

Sacred East, Dying West:

A Study in the Slavophile Ideology of Aleksei Khomiakov

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Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter I: Holy Russia and the Unworthy West in the Eyes of Khomiakov	26
Chapter II: Khomiakov and William Palmer	60
Conclusion	94
Bibliography	99

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Introduction

The Slavophiles were a group of men out to change the world; no small task for any group of people. Nevertheless this group of philosophers, writers, theologians, poets and historians (to name a few of their endeavors) truly felt that the world must change, and that Russia would change it. The Slavophile movement rests roughly within the confines of the first half of the 19th century in Tsarist Russia. Although the movement has its prescribed place in history, its impact profoundly affected the way Russians understood their own country, heritage and religion. Although the Slavophiles were a loosely organized group of thinkers, there was some sense of internal order. The man generally considered the nominal leader of the group was a Russian aristocrat by the name of Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov (1804-1860). This thesis primarily explores Khomiakov's theological and religious thought. Within Khomiakov's theological work (which is considered his greatest contribution to the Slavophile movement) these chapters will examine first Khomiakov's general thoughts on Russia, its Orthodox Church, and their relationship to Western Europe, followed by a chapter dealing exclusively with Khomiakov's conception of the Orthodox Church. But before we can understand Khomiakov's writings and beliefs, we must examine who Khomiakov was, the nature of his Slavophile movement, and the extraordinary times in which these events were taking place.

The word Slavophile is in itself revealing. The name can be broken down into two parts, the first being 'Slav'. Slavs are essentially the groups of peoples who today occupy much of Eastern Europe and Russia. The word is an ethnic denomination, an umbrella

term for many now distinct countries and peoples; among them Russians, Serbs, Bulgarians, Poles, Czechs and Ukrainians to name a few. The second part, ‘phile’ derives from the Greek word for love. So, Slavophile could most readily be translated as ‘lover of Slavs’. Although the name implies overarching activism on behalf of all Slavic peoples, the focus of much of Slavophilism was centered on Russia’s identity and role as the perceived great leader of all Slavs. Let us begin by looking into the background of the leader who defined this movement, Aleksei Khomiakov.

The Man

Like most of the Russian intelligentsia, Khomiakov was a privileged member of the nobility. But there are certain aspects of his family history and his own personal development that are unique and perhaps offer some insight into this man’s unshakable, singular vision of Russia. Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov was born on May 1st, 1804 in Moscow. He belonged to an established aristocratic family with a long, distinguished past. Their name appears as far back as the records of Tsar Basil III (1505-1533).¹ One of the family’s most significant stories takes place in the 18th Century. Cyril Khomiakov, Aleksei’s predecessor, was master of a large estate with many serfs. But Cyril had lost his family, and was in search of an heir to his great fortune. He assembled a council of his serfs and commissioned them to seek out from among his family the most worthy, who would then inherit his vast fortune. The peasant council ended up choosing a young, distant, and poor relative of the Khomiakov line, Feodor, who had been serving in the Imperial Guard at the time to be heir to Cyril’s fortune. Suddenly, Feodor was lifted from

¹ Nicholas Zernov, “Introductory Essay on Khomiakov, his life, times, and theology,” in *A Classic of Russian Orthodox Theology: The Church is One*, Alexey Khomiakov. (London: The Fellowship of St. Alban and St. Sergius, 1968), 4.

obscurity and poverty, and two generations later would give rise to his grandson Aleksei, who would become one of the foremost Russian thinkers of his day.²

This background undoubtedly had a profound effect on Khomiakov's self-identity. Most aristocrats saw themselves as something far above and beyond the average Russian, as most in the 18th century spoke French better than their native tongue. Perhaps Khomiakov saw more fate in his own family's close connection to the peasantry, and realized the closeness that he and all his class had to the common Russian.

His education was quite adequate; he received lessons from private tutors in his youth, as was the custom for members of the nobility. Khomiakov himself was fluent in French, English, German, and was schooled in both the Greek and Latin classics. He was taught Russian by a family friend and little-known Russian playwright, Andrei Gendre.³

A few early incidents in young Khomiakov's life show an astonishingly early proclivity for what would become major Slavophile themes. One of these was a dislike for the Western-style capital of St. Petersburg. When Khomiakov and his younger brother Fyodor were forced to relocate to the northern city with their family in 1815, the two brothers, upon seeing the odd Western-style spires and buildings, were convinced that it was a "pagan" city, and that the heathens there would try and force them to convert to another faith. They vowed never to submit.⁴

Another extremely important event in the formation of Khomiakov's worldview was Napoleon's invasion of Russia in the War of 1812. The invasion was among some of the most dramatic events of the 19th century, and with it came Russia's victory over the

² Ibid., 4-5.

³ Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism*, vol. 1, A. S. Xomjakov (The Hague, Netherlands: Moutin & Co., 1961), 26.

⁴ Ibid., 27.

French, and the beginning of unprecedented Russian influence in the West. The Khomiakov's Moscow home was destroyed in the inferno that gripped the city in the wake of Napoleon's attacking army.⁵ Such fortuitous events had a massive impact on the developing psyche of a boy who would attack the West as a land of moral depravity.

When war broke out between the oppressed Orthodox Greeks and their Turkish overlords in 1821, a seventeen-year-old Aleksei sneaked out of his home in an aborted attempt to join in the fight. The following year Aleksei's father entered him in the Russian Army, where he served in both southern Russia and in a horse guards regiment in St. Petersburg. It was at this time Khomiakov became personally acquainted with many future participants in the unsuccessful Decembrist Revolt against the Tsar in December of 1825. Khomiakov, not surprisingly, was against such an armed revolutionary uprising.⁶

What was potentially more important in Khomiakov's early years was the profound influence of his mother. Maria Kireevskaya, a devout Orthodox Christian, instilled her son with a deep love and respect of their native religion that Aleksei was never to lose. She always followed strictly the fasts of the Church and its liturgical calendar, and was undoubtedly of major importance to Aleksei's spiritual development and faith, which he carried with him for the rest of his life.⁷ While studying abroad in Paris as a younger man, Khomiakov noted that he had successfully kept all the fasting rules prescribed by the Orthodox Church during Great Lent.⁸ As anyone who knows will undoubtedly agree, fasting in the Orthodox Church can be extremely strict, with no meat or dairy products, fish, wine or oil being permitted at all during the fast of Great Lent.

⁵ Ibid., 26-27.

⁶ Ibid., 28.

⁷ James M. Edie, James P Scanlan, Mary-Barbara Zeldin, eds., volume II, *Russian Philosophy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), 214.

⁸ Christoff, *Xomjakov*, 29.

While many of his contemporaries arrived at their Orthodox convictions later in life, Khomiakov's personal faith remained unwavering, and the brilliant innovative character of his theological writings is a testament to this faith.

A brief catalog of Khomiakov's major publications and writings would do well to give a more well-rounded picture of the leading Slavophile. Khomiakov's earliest publications were dramatic in nature, and consisted of two plays. The first was *Yermak*, in 1829, followed by *The False Dmitrii*, in 1833.⁹ Both were early examples of Khomiakov's emerging belief in Russia's greatness mythologized in an epic past. In 1838 Khomiakov began writing his Universal History, later nicknamed the *Semeramida*, which tried to catalog the Slavic struggle for freedom throughout mankind's history. Turning towards the philosophical and political in his mature years, Khomiakov published his essay, "On the Old and New" in 1839, which dealt with Russia's historical legacy and contemporary issues of identity. His other major non-theological works included his essay, "Foreigners' Opinion of Russia" in 1845 and its counterpart "Russians' Opinions of Foreigners" in 1846. This was followed later by his didactic letter "To the Serbs" signed by the other leading Slavophiles in 1860 that outlined the challenges facing the newly independent Orthodox Serbs and how they could face these challenges together with Russia.¹⁰ Khomiakov's last publications dealt with philosophical and social issues in the form of his unfinished letter, "Contemporary Developments in the Domain of

⁹ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study in Romantic Ideology* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), 35.

¹⁰ An excellent collection of Khomiakov's major articles and letters can be found in Aleksei Khomiakov, *Izbranniye Socheneniya*, ed. Prof. N. S. Arseniev (New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1955). Another useful compact bibliographical outline can be found in Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 34-40.

Philosophy” to his protégé Yuri Samarin in 1860, the year of his death, and a detailed scheme outlining the abolition of serfdom in 1859.¹¹

Khomiakov’s theological works will be the focus of this paper, and I have separated them out to view together as a group. Khomiakov’s theology was by and large fully developed when he began writing about theology, and the continuity in his theological polemics and letters is quite remarkable. It should also be noted that the vast majority of Khomiakov’s theological works were polemical in nature. The most important of these polemics was a series of theological discussions entitled *Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communions*, and published abroad in 1853, 1855, and 1858. These were written in French, as Khomiakov was writing for a larger European audience about Orthodoxy, and felt that French was more or less the *lingua franca* of Europe. These three articles appeared towards the end of a long, ten-year correspondence with William Palmer, an English theologian and professor at Magdalene College, Oxford. Khomiakov and Palmer became acquainted by reputation through mutual friends, and subsequently began a theological discourse in letter-form on the nature of Christianity in the East and West. The correspondence was very important for Khomiakov’s theological development, as it forced him to crystallize his arguments and engage in active debate about Orthodox and Western Christianity with a Western theologian. The correspondence was conducted entirely in English and lasted from 1844-1854, culminating in Khomiakov’s visit to Palmer at Oxford in 1847. This collection of letters and French writings are the two sources that form the foundation of Khomiakov’s theology. The first chapter in this paper will deal with Khomiakov’s French writings, and the second with Khomiakov’s correspondence with Palmer.

¹¹ Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, pg. 37.

There is one last theological work which merits special attention. Although almost all of Khomiakov's theology was produced either in dialogue with William Palmer or addressed the West at large in his French writings, Khomiakov did make one attempt to systematize and distill the primary elements of his religious philosophy into a compact, coherent form. The result was a short catechetical essay on the Orthodox Church entitled "The Church is One" (*Tserkov' Odna*). The exact date of composition is not known, with various scholarly guesses placing the date somewhere in the second half of the 1840's, but most likely in 1845.¹² Khomiakov's essay was published posthumously for the first time in 1863 in *Pravoslavnie Obozreniye*, as a theological work by a layman outside the official channels of the Russian Church would never have been allowed past the heavy censorship of the time. Khomiakov's efforts to get the essay published abroad also proved unsuccessful.¹³ And so, in the end, Khomiakov's one systematic exposition of his theology did not even appear in print in the author's lifetime. Although, as a summation of Khomiakov's theology, there is nothing new in his essay, it nevertheless will prove useful periodically when dealing with Khomiakov's complex religious philosophy.

Now that we have formed an idea of who Khomiakov was, let us take a look at the Orthodox Church that was so central to Khomiakov's thought. Within the Orthodox Church's complex history and theology were tied up virtually all of Khomiakov's ideas regarding the nature of Russia, its people, its history, and its future. Khomiakov felt Russia's Orthodoxy was the means of Russia's salvation, and the "One True Faith" that was superior to all of Western Christendom's counterparts. As such, a brief history of the Russian Orthodox Church is also in order.

¹² Edmund G. Cook, "Russia and the West in the Ecclesiology of Khomyakov" (master's thesis, The Ohio State University, 1978), 73.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

Russia's Church is merely one branch of a larger Orthodox Church. In the early days of the Christian Church, there were five distinctly recognized Patriarchates with prescribed territories, and together these represented the whole Christian world. The Patriarchates were as follows: Antioch (the oldest of them all), Constantinople, Rome, Alexandria, and Jerusalem. This was in the days before any serious, lasting division had affected the Christian Church. Hence, there were no Catholic, no Orthodox and no Protestant Churches, just the Christian communities of the five Patriarchates.¹⁴

Once Constantinople became the new capital of the Roman Empire in 324 A.D., and following the sacking of Rome in 410 A.D., there was a gradual estrangement and increased separation culturally and spiritually between a predominantly Latin-speaking West based in Rome, and the Greek-speaking Byzantine Empire to the East. The Christianity of the two regions also began to become dissimilar. The Roman Pope gained more political power in an increasingly volatile environment separated from the cultural continuity and stability of the Byzantine East. As his power and claims of absolute authority over the whole Christian Church grew, so rose tensions from a vehemently objecting East. The Western Church had even implemented slight changes to the Nicene Creed, one of the most important dogmatic documents in Christianity. These changes were not well-received in the Orthodox East, and were implemented without their approval.

The final act of separation between the two groups occurred in 1054, and has since been labeled the Great Schism. Amid ever-rising hostility between the Roman Pope and the Churches of the East, an emissary of the Pope in Constantinople delivered a Papal

¹⁴ For an excellent reference for Orthodoxy's history from the early Church to the present day, see Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 11-191.

Bull excommunicating the Patriarch of Constantinople, and in effect the entire Eastern Church. Astounded by the Pope's audacity in his ability to excommunicate an entire Church, the Patriarch of Constantinople hastily followed suit and excommunicated the Pope. And so, since then, a gulf between the Orthodox Churches of the East and the Catholic (and subsequently Protestant) Churches had been created that has yet to be bridged.

All hope of reconciliation was totally decimated during the Crusades. In 1204, a Western army en-route to war with the Muslims stopped in Constantinople. What ensued was a three-day rape and pillage of the Byzantine capital as Constantinople was mercilessly sacked by its protecting army. The Western army sent to protect Christianity in the East from the militant expansion of Islam resulted in a lasting, bitter disdain of many Orthodox peoples towards the West. The wounds would never fully heal, and the two Churches were forever estranged.

It was before this, in the 9th century, that Byzantine missionaries to the Slavs, Cyril and Methodius, began work which would eventually lead to the conversion of Kievan Rus' to Christianity in 988 by Prince Vladimir. And so, by the time of the Slavophiles, Russia and the majority of Slavs had been Orthodox Christians for over eight centuries, and had a religious identity and heritage extremely different from that of Western Christianity. Khomiakov was passionately aware of this history, and found it crucial to understanding Russia and all Slavic nations. Khomiakov felt Russia, as the strongest of all Orthodox nations, had a special role and responsibility in the East's relations with the West. The stark contrasts Khomiakov saw between the Orthodox East

and the Latin West motivated much of his philosophical and theological works. He felt the West was prejudiced against an Orthodox East that it did not understand.

The Debate

In many historical discussions, the term Slavophile is often said in the same breath as another related word of the times, Westernizer. The Slavophiles were not conducting a one-way dialogue with Russia at large about their country, they had a counterpart, another voice balancing the opposite side of the scale, so to speak. Although the beginnings of both groups share a common origin, the group of thinkers gradually drifted apart to form two separate camps, Slavophile and Westernizer. The dialogue between the two could best be characterized as a debate about the nature and future of Russia. This debate between the Westernizers and Slavophiles was a manifestation of the urge to understand their land and people. It was also one of the high points in Russian theological and philosophical thinking. But why a debate? What set the two groups apart? The Westernizers were appalled by Russia's "backwardness" and felt it absolutely necessary to modernize the country, adapt European ways, and assimilate fully into the modern world of Western Europe. The Slavophiles wished to define Russianness in terms of *Russia*, looking inward to native tradition and a somewhat idolized and mythologized conception of a national culture, letting those be the roots of a society that would realize its destiny of greatness. It was time for Russia to change itself, realize its potential, and carry that out to the rest of the world. The great question was how that was to be accomplished.

But again, in the beginning, there was merely a collection of aristocrats and intellectuals interested in Russia's place in the world. The literary and cultural circles that would later develop into the formal Slavophile camp were based in Moscow, and not the northern, Western designed capital of St. Petersburg. St. Petersburg was Peter the Great's window to the West, and because of that, most Slavophiles, who glorified Russia's pre-Petrine past, were proud to base their movement in the ancient, pre-empirical capital of Moscow. The ancient capital was where the lion's share of both Westernizer and Slavophile ideology originated.

It was the late 1820's and early 1830's in Moscow that the nucleus of the Slavophile camp can be found. Prince Vladimir Odoevsky was the man responsible for organizing much of the early salon activity in Moscow that introduced future Slavophiles and Westernizers to each other in the late 1820's.¹⁵ Among these important early acquaintances, Khomiakov befriended the brothers Peter and Ivan Aksakov as well as Ivan Kireevsky (arguable the second most important figure in the Slavophile movement after Khomiakov), and the four became particularly close in the early 1830's, meeting in salons and formulating what would become Slavophilism's key tenets. A few years later in the mid-1830's another important Slavophile and intellectual disciple of Khomiakov, Yuri Samarin, joined the still loosely organized Slavophile camp.¹⁶

Most of the talk at these salons and late-night gatherings was about Russia's future path and role in the world. Before one could distinguish a Slavophile or Westernizer camp, the major figures of both groups were all discussing and fervently debating the future of their country together in a confusing web of dialogue. The future

¹⁵ Christoff, *Xomjakov*, 35.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

Slavophiles mentioned above, spearheaded by Khomiakov, harbored a more antagonistic view of Western Europe (always referred to in Russia simply as ‘The West’). They felt the West had nothing new to offer Russia, and was dramatically summed up in Prince Odoevsky’s words in his work *Russian Nights*, when he declared, “The West is perishing!”¹⁷

Amidst all this debate about what Russia was in relation to the West, one might get the impression that Russia was terribly self-conscious of itself. And at this time, that is certainly not an exaggeration. Russia had been comparing itself to the West in some form or another for centuries. Much of this was due to the first Russian Emperor Peter the Great (1689-1725) and the series of drastic reforms he implemented throughout his reign. Peter was a man of imposing physical stature to match his equally indomitable will. He was convinced that Russia was a horribly backwards country, had fallen behind the times both socially and economically, and was in desperate need of reform. While Peter’s reforms were many in number and left practically no aspect of society untouched, a few of his reforms were of particular significance for both Slavophiles and Westernizers.

Peter insisted on modernizing the country. He marched his army into the swamps of northwest Russia, a territory that had been conquered from the Swedes, and founded St. Petersburg in 1703. The settlement started as a small military fort that he would later be proclaimed the new capital of Imperial Russia. St. Petersburg was planned to be a Western European city with wide boulevards, canals in imitation of Peter’s beloved Amsterdam, and an entirely Western European feel; a drastic departure from the medieval Moscow where Peter was forced to spend his childhood. He forced the nobility to relocate in large numbers to his city, introduced Western-style dress and manners,

¹⁷ Ibid., 38.

compelled many of his young noblemen to study overseas, and recruited builders and engineers from the West to help Russia catch up economically, especially in naval technology. And thus, the Russian nobleman became more estranged from the common peasant, the cultural barrier which Peter helped erect would grow into a large gulf by Khomiakov's time.

Perhaps more importantly for the Slavophiles, Peter fundamentally changed Russian Orthodoxy's role in society. There had been a long power struggle between the Russian Patriarch (titular leader of the Russian Orthodox Church) and the tsar. However, that relationship changed forever once Peter declared Russia an Empire and himself the ultimate autocrat (much like his contemporary in France, the Sun King, Louis XIV). Peter executed extremely drastic church reforms, destroying the Patriarchate and putting the Synod of Bishops (a council of all the bishops in the Russian Church) in its place. The Synod was ruled over by the Chief Procurator, a layman appointed directly by the Emperor. All Synodal decrees and decisions had to pass through the Chief Procurator in order to be approved. In short, Peter made the Russian Church politically subservient to the crown, removing its symbolic leader the Patriarch and ensuring the Church was totally dependent on the autocrat's (and hence the government's) patronage.

For Slavophiles, and particularly the religiously minded Khomiakov, Peter the Great had had a disastrous impact on Russian society. He had forced Russians to think of themselves more in terms of what made them cultured and advanced by Western European standards. More importantly, he severed the link between the ruling classes and their connection to Russia's people and her native traditions and religion. Orthodoxy had been the mortar that built Russian culture (which was essentially the only culture before

Peter), and by destroying Russian Orthodoxy's vitality and independence, the Slavophiles felt Peter had denied Russians that which gave them their identity. A free Orthodoxy was the cultural font of knowledge for Khomiakov and the Slavophiles. Without it, Russia had no identity and no chance of transforming the world.

It was Khomiakov who insisted that the key to realizing Russia's greatness was in the Russia that existed before the "invasion" (as he saw it) of Western culture brought on by the sweeping and harsh reforms of Peter the Great. Russia's native Orthodox Christian religious tradition and identity was the paramount component of Russia's potential. The Slavophiles believed that through the Orthodox tradition that Russia developed independently in the centuries before Peter the Great, the true roots of what made Russia great could be found. Through that Orthodoxy a Christian culture had developed and nurtured the Russian people (*narod*) into a society that prized the community above the individual, that cared for its members through societal structures like the peasant commune (*obshchina*), which administered the land and kept social order. Indeed, it was these peasants in particular who formed the backbone of Russian culture. The peasants, by remaining largely unaffected by the Petrine reforms that transformed the aristocracy and set it apart from the common people, had preserved the true Russian character and possessed the key to unlocking Russia's bright future according to the Slavophiles.

The Westernizers simply did not see things this way. As the name suggests, they felt Russia was still in need of Westernization and reform. Russia was still her own country, with her own identity and consciousness, but she should continue to import and adopt Western economic and social practices, like vigorously develop industry and heed the political transformations towards constitutional/parliamentary governments that

countries like France and Great Britain had been experiencing. They also hailed and respected Western philosophical developments, particularly that of the Germans. This Westernizer sentiment began to congeal around Peter Chaadaev, an early proponent of Westernization whose 1836 “Philosophical Letter” in the journal *Teleskop* had inspired another extremely important early proponent of Westernization, Alexander Herzen. Chaadaev’s article contended that Russian society had by and large contributed and achieved nothing, due largely to the Russian Orthodox Church’s inability to foster social progress. He further argued that Catholicism had been the catalyst for the betterment of society in the West in a way Orthodoxy in the East never had.¹⁸

Nothing could be further from the truth for Khomiakov and the Slavophiles. Yet those supporting Chaadaev’s views were growing in number. To their ranks were soon added two of the most important early Westernizers. The first has already been mentioned, Alexander Herzen. The second was a man by the name of Vissarion Belinsky. Belinsky would also exercise an enormous amount of influence over Westernizer supporters, as he became one of their most opinionated spokesmen. He was a literary critic and skillfully used his position to herald new literary talent as well as be commentator on Russia’s dire need to westernize. Belinsky soon became known for chiding the already legendary Gogol on his short work, “A Correspondence Between Friends,”¹⁹ in which he disclosed his strong Orthodox convictions and urged his friends to zealously adhere to the Church for meaning.

A formal demarcation between the two camps gradually became a reality. Although it is difficult to put a precise date on their separation, a public act of aggression

¹⁸ Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: Second Edition, Volume I: to 1917* (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2002), 365.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 366.

on the part of a Slavophile sympathizer made the separation final. In December of 1844, Khomiakov's own brother-in-law, N. Yazykov, wrote and circulated a series of inflammatory verses and dedicated them to the Westernizer leaders. Herzen was furious and blamed Khomiakov entirely, and it does seem likely that Khomiakov had something to do with the matter. How much of it was his idea, we will never know.²⁰ With the break between these two groups complete, history would portray them as polar opposites of Russian reform. The Slavophiles asked Russia to look within herself for change, and the Westernizers insisted her future lay in increased contact with the West.

One of the Twentieth Century's greatest scholars on the subject of the Slavophiles was Nicholas Riasanovsky. His work, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles*, is extremely helpful in further characterizing Khomiakov's (and hence the Slavophiles') relationship with the West. An excellent way in which to examine this relationship of Khomiakov to the West is in Riasanovsky's idea of "We and They" ("We" of course meaning Russia and "They" meaning the West).²¹ This stresses Russia's "otherness", its identity as something apart from the rest of Europe, with something unique to offer to the world.

This We/They relationship can be seen as a struggle. Not only was the spiritual and moral disintegration of Western Europe harming itself, it threatened to spread to Russia. As intellectual thought was finally breaking away from the Western slant it had been forced to adopt by Peter the Great, the Slavophiles wished to expose this struggle and thereby reveal Russia's own course and purpose in history.²² Khomiakov's thought clearly fit this model of self-imposed segregation, a model that attempted to show that it

²⁰ Christoff, *Khomiakov*, 79-80.

²¹ Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 90.

²² *Ibid.*, 67.

was what made Russia unique which could both illuminate Russia's path as well as lead the rest of the world out of its errors.

The Slavophiles found the uniqueness of Russia in its people and their Orthodox faith. Yet these findings in themselves were not unique. Their firm belief in the Russian people's inherent greatness corresponded to the Romantic movement of Western Europe, more specifically to Romantic Nationalism. The Slavophiles were part of a large segment of educated society in 19th century Russia that used the ideas of Romantic Nationalism to create a new source of their country's greatness. This source was a mythology of the common people, the peasants, as the noble bearers of Russia's national culture who had preserved its ancient traditions and faith. The peasant underwent a metaphysical transformation in the abstractions of intellectuals from the slovenly servant to the noble personification of the "true" Russian, untouched and uncorrupted by the outside world. These transformations were occurring all across Europe, as each nation and ethnic culture sought to create a pure national culture. The irony here was that Russians (as was so often their habit) borrowed this concept from Western Europe and used it set themselves apart from the West, creating a national mystique that glorified the peasant for being so Russian, and hence, so unlike the West.

The Times

But what was the political milieu of Tsarist Russia in the time of the Slavophiles? Unfortunately for the Slavophiles, even though their more conservative ideology which extolled the Russian people and discouraged armed insurrection against the Orthodox Tsar seemed compatible with Emperor Nicholas I's government, anything that did not

issue forth directly from Nicholas' throne was subject to suspicion. Khomiakov's life primarily coincided with the reign of Nicholas I (1825-1855). Known to many as the "Iron Tsar", Nicholas perhaps came the closest monarch to governing with a total and absolute power that practically all Russian monarchs so vehemently adhered to. Nicholas' advisors formulated a three-pronged State policy that would become the cornerstone of the Russian policy for the remainder of Nicholas' reign. These three tenets were embodied simply and boldly as "Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality", and all together became known as "Official Nationality". Nicholas Riasanovsky, in his critical work on the subject, entitled *Nicholas I in Official Nationality in Russia, 1825-1855*, looks at the origins of this massive statewide policy and its implications for both the people and the Church.

The first and most important element in this trinity of power was Orthodoxy. It was the foundation upon which the other two rested. Nicholas' chief architect of Official Nationality was his Minister of Education, S. Uvarov. He passionately argued that Orthodoxy was the moral force that was the ultimate expression of the Russian people, its fulfillment. Russia's Orthodoxy was the means of her own salvation, and would give her peace and prosperity. While the West had experienced violent revolutions which destroyed the ruling houses of countries like France, Russia had held fast to her faith, and it would protect and nourish the Russian people.²³ Clearly, Orthodoxy was used as a political weapon, a means of control. Orthodoxy would always be preached in Russia's Churches alongside the doctrine of absolute loyalty to the sovereign; the Church was

²³ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Nicholas I in Official Nationality in Russia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 74-76.

essentially at the beck and call of the Emperor.²⁴ Khomiakov harbored a lifelong aversion to the Russian Church's hierarchy, never very trustful of it. He constantly stressed the crucial importance and participation of the laity in the legitimacy and universality of the Church. In light of how the Russian State was using the Church, Khomiakov's hostility seems rightly justified.

The second interrelated principle was Autocracy. Autocracy was a more stable and definable presence, because it was all tied up in the will of one man, the tsar. Autocracy meant nothing less than the absolute sanctity, invulnerability and power of the tsar. His infallibility was carefully connected to the first tenet of Orthodoxy. God alone gave the tsar this power, and he was given dispensation to rule with an iron fist by God Himself.²⁵ Supporters of Official Nationality felt this kind of power was especially necessary amidst Russian society. The personage of the Autocrat was the perfect master of the unruly Russian masses. Many officials at the time seemed to have a dual aversion yet attraction to the common Russian peasant. He was generally an uncultured, wretched thing, yet capable of greatness. Although Man was inherently wicked and despoiled, the Autocrat was the symbol of authority and control that could retain order amidst such a society.²⁶ There was frighteningly little room for any independent thought like those of the Slavophiles during these times of officially prescribed opinions about virtually everything. Nicholas I also severely curtailed access to higher education, and the small number of students at universities in St. Petersburg and Moscow were vigilantly watched.

The last precept was the somewhat quizzical concept of Nationality (*Narodnost'*). Designed perhaps intentionally to be vague for the purposes of its universal application,

²⁴ Ibid., 95.

²⁵ Ibid., 96-97.

²⁶ Ibid., 99-101.

the idea was mostly clearly tied to the Russian people. Nationality's design attempted to engender absolute obedience and love for the tsar. All true Russian's would love their tsar with unmitigated vigor, it was what made them Russian. It was their national culture, so to speak. Although this could be ascribed wholly to the realm of propaganda and a defense of a serfdom which kept the ignorant masses ignorant and dependent on the benevolent tsar, there also existed a more reciprocal aspect. For the policy makers and government officials themselves passionately believed this innate love of every Russian for his tsar to be true. They were convinced that it was an integral part of a Russian national character, a myth that recognized the tsar as the common father, the *batyushka*, of all Russians.²⁷ The three precepts in this Official Nationality permeated nearly every aspect of Russian life in Khomiakov's time, and made it extremely difficult for his unique and bold theories and beliefs to be openly discussed and disseminated.

Riasanovsky points out that Nicholas himself was very devout, and felt Orthodoxy would engender Russians to be good citizens of the Empire.²⁸ But this positive outcome could be achieved only when the workings of the Church conformed to the State's vision of its role. Censorship in general plagued the Empire not just in matters religion, but in the field of education so important to Khomiakov. Riasanovsky specifically cites incidents when authors were forced to get rid of statements like "forces of nature" in physics textbooks.²⁹ Of course, this general atmosphere of oppression also applied to the Orthodox Church. The government administration had a three-category system of all religious dissenters deemed to be dangerous to the well-being of the Church. The categories were divided into "most pernicious," "pernicious," "and "less

²⁷ Ibid., 124-127.

²⁸ Ibid., 224.

²⁹ Ibid., 222.

pernicious.”³⁰ Riasanovsky also points out these categories could be assigned to individuals or groups who objected to practically anything from Church sacraments to Church hierarchy. It is no small wonder that Khomiakov had continual trouble in receiving manuscripts from abroad or sending pieces of writing to the West in order to be published. This could never have been accomplished through official channels, as is evidenced by Khomiakov sending one of his theological articles in French to Palmer for publication abroad.³¹ Obviously, but most importantly, Khomiakov as a politically unconnected layman had little chance of publishing any of his theological writings in Russia.

This paper contains two main chapters. In the first, I discuss Khomiakov’s overall theology and world-view. In particular I explore Khomiakov’s belief that Russia was a sacred nation with a mission to save the world from a deeply flawed West. In so doing, it is an examination of why Russia was so exceptional, and what made it so. This logically includes a look at Khomiakov’s critique of Western Christianity and philosophy, which became some of his most impressive arguments for the sacred role of Russia and its Orthodoxy. The second chapter is a more nuanced look at Khomiakov’s theories about the Orthodox Church, as seen primarily through his correspondence with William Palmer. In their letters, we can see a detailed schema for the organization of the Church for Khomiakov, which was a Church of perfect order and harmony. However, alongside Khomiakov’s vision of Christian perfection in unity, the skeptical and much more pragmatic Palmer reveals the dichotomy between the abstract perfection of the Church

³⁰ Ibid., 224.

³¹ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church During the Last Fifty Years, Containing a Correspondence between Mr. William Palmer Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford and M. Khomiakoff, in the years 1844-1854*, ed. W. J. Birkbeck (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895), 133.

and the realities of the Christian world. These differences in individual opinion forced the two theologians to thoroughly argue their points, but also did much to illustrate fundamental differences in Eastern and Western religious thought.

Chapter I: Holy Russia and the Unworthy West in the Eyes of Khomiakov

Russia has long been a place where her thinkers have searched for the roots of what it was that made them Russian. A mystery even unto her own inhabitants, the very idea of Russia was one so indefinable yet so powerful that it gave rise to some of the country's greatest writers; eternal names like Pushkin and Dostoevsky among so many others. One of the most important movements in this larger process of soul-searching and self-definition was the Slavophile-Westernizer debate of the 19th century. In the front lines of the Slavophile ranks stood Aleksei Khomiakov, who helped lead this movement and became one of their most brilliant writers.

Although the Slavophiles covered a vast swath of intellectual territory, there were some broad, shared themes. All were convinced of the potential power that Russia could have over the rest of Europe. They were convinced once Russia found herself, not only would she at last have her place in the world, but would thereby “bring salvation to the West”.¹ For Khomiakov, this potentiality lay in the community of the Russian people, their traditions and history, but above all in their religious identity as Orthodox Christians. Across much of Khomiakov's diverse work, theological and secular, came the bold assertion that the West had proven itself unworthy to rule the world, and that the Russian Orthodox East had a sacred mission to transform and save a world that had been polluted from within by the West itself. There were many ways in which the West had demonstrated this unworthiness in the eyes of Khomiakov. In the West, the individual sought to rationally and logically explain all phenomena, including religion and God. The

¹ James M. Edie, James P Scanlan, Mary-Barbara Zeldin, eds., volume II, *Russian Philosophy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), 219.

Orthodox East, however, possessed something Khomiakov came to call *sobornost*, a living community of believers that existed within the Church and bound all together. The Russian people echoed this divine synthesis in their own social structures. By polluting their own society, the West had also done irreparable harm to their understanding of religion, and both the Protestant and Catholic Churches had fallen into error. Khomiakov elucidated these errors in detail, and sought to show Russia's destiny to save the world to both Russians and the world.

Russia's Holiness

Khomiakov truly believed that Russia was to save the world, and he used Russia's Orthodox Church as one of his primary tools in showing the West where it had gone wrong, and how the East offered the solution.² In order for the world to see Russia as their redeemer, as the carrier of the Truth, Khomiakov needed to re-introduce Europe to Orthodoxy. In a series of articles written in French and published abroad in Europe, Khomiakov sought to defend Orthodoxy against the attacks of some of its Catholic and Protestant opponents. In so doing, he also hoped to formulate new ideas in Orthodox theology that would both reinforce its place as the sole protector of the Apostolic Tradition in the Christian world as well as help the West see how its Catholic and Protestant Churches had fallen away from Truth so that they might see the error of their ways. Highly original in his thoughts and writings, he became one of the first to attempt to create a distinctly Russian theology, free from borrowed conceptions of the Church

² Khomiakov sees Russians as the big brother and protector of all other Slavs and Orthodox Christians. In his writings, when he talks about Orthodoxy, he is also talking about Russia, since it was the largest Orthodox nation. This same relationship holds for Khomiakov's frequent phrase "the East." This in the same way refers to all Orthodox (most prominently Russia, of course) and serves the same dual implication.

from the Latin West.³ And so, these original writings attempted to demonstrate the worthiness of the Orthodox Russians in their cause to save the world, as well as the unworthiness of the West.

To show this worthiness, Khomiakov is best known for the creation of an idea that came to be known as *sobornost*. It is a strong theme that runs through much of his writing on religion. Difficult to define, it can be seen as a unique conception of the Church as a community, freely joined by its members, united by this freedom and by mutual love for one another and for God.⁴ Love is an essential component to this community of believers, and figures heavily in Khomiakov's arguments. Love, he believed, flows from the heart, not the mind, and will unite the two in faith. The rational mind cannot lead to inner knowledge of God, it is bestowed by the grace of God to those who have found truth through the heart.⁵ This network of the Church broke all physical barriers, and was an extremely radical concept in its day. Put another way, sobornost is "...the quality of being in accordance with the unity of all, the unity of humanity in God."⁶ This union is extra-organizational, metaphysical, and a holy mystery in itself. Khomiakov also argued that this sobornost can be found in a discovery of self within the Church, but this self-discovery does not lead to a fragmentation of the body of the Church into merely a collection of individuals, since all are united through the grace of God's

³ Robert Bird, introduction to *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader* eds. and trans. Robert Bird and Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 11.

⁴ Edie, *Russian Philosophy*, 161-162.

⁵ Aleksei Khomiakov, "Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communions, on the Occasion of a Brochure by Mr. Laurentie," in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader* eds. and trans. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 58. Hereafter to be referred to as "SR Kh. 1" followed by page number

⁶ Bird, introduction to *On Spiritual Unity*, 14-15.

love.⁷ In this way, Khomiakov believed both the individual and the nation could find and understand themselves.

Looking at the Church in this light, Khomiakov took the concept a step further. He postulated that this Church of sobornost is truly guided by the Holy Spirit, with its members united in love and open acceptance of the Christian God.⁸ This meant that when the Church made decisions *as a united group*, these decision would be invisibly guided by the Holy Spirit in the consensus of the people, and such decisions could then be deemed legitimate and truly Canonical. For Khomiakov, the Church never changed, but from time to time, as issues arose (for example, the early heresies such as Nestorianism and Arianism) the Church needed to re-define her parameters and show what was truth and what was heresy.

This idea of universal agreement and community was not new. Khomiakov drew very heavily on ideas already deep within Orthodoxy's history, namely the early Church (Ecumenical) Councils. The Orthodox Church recognizes six Ecumenical Councils; these were councils that met with representatives of all the world's Christian churches, the first being convened in Constantinople by Emperor Constantine himself. Orthodoxy teaches that because of the adequate representation of the world's Churches at these councils, and their actions *as a united group*, their decisions were guided and arbitrated by the Holy Spirit, and could then be understood as Canon Law. These councils formed the foundation of the operating laws (canons) of the Church. However, after the Great Schism of the Church between East and West in 1054, this universality of the Church was

⁷ Aleksei Khomiakov, "Some Remarks by an Orthodox Christian Concerning the Western Communions, on the Occasion of a Letter Published by the Archbishop of Paris," in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, eds. and trans. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 78. Hereafter referred to as "SR Kh 2" followed by page number

⁸ Bird, introduction to *On Spiritual Unity*, 12.

broken, with only the Orthodox Churches of the East still recognizing this necessity.

Khomiakov thus brilliantly constructed his sobornost in parallel to operating precepts of the Orthodox Church already existent.

Tracing the origins of Khomiakov's use of sobornost has proved difficult. Khomiakov rarely used the word himself. Since the majority of Khomiakov's theological writings were in French and English, it was most likely convenient for Khomiakov to define it and use the concept in context, due to the essentially untranslatable nature of the word.⁹ In one of Khomiakov's major Western polemics written to the editor of *L'Union Chrietienne*, in French, Khomiakov simply used the Russian word sobornost instead of attempting to create a French equivalent.¹⁰ Still other veiled references were made to it in a letter to the English theologian William Palmer in 1850, when Khomiakov vaguely explained that he had been trying to formulate a more firm definition of the fundamental differences which separated the Eastern and Western communions, but that it was something that defied formal definitions.¹¹

The most concrete references made concerning sobornost are to be found in one of Khomiakov's last published works, that same polemic that appeared in *L'Union Chrietienne* in 1860, the year of his death. It includes a discussion on the proper translation into Church Slavonic (the language of the Russian Orthodox Church) of the Greek word "katholikos". Khomiakov firmly asserted that the word had been correctly translated by Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the Apostles to the Slavs in the 9th Century, as

⁹ Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism*, vol. 1, A. S. Xomjakov (The Hague, Netherlands: Moutin & Co., 1961), 141.

¹⁰ Ibid., 145, 147.

¹¹ Khomiakov to Palmer, 8 Oct. 1850, in *Russia and the English Church During the Last Fifty Years: Containing a Correspondence Between Mr. William Palmer of Magdalene College, Oxford, and Mr. Khomiakoff, in the Years 1844-1854*, ed. W. J. Birkbeck (London: Remington, Percival & Co., 1895.), 94.

soborniy, and not *katholicheskiy*.¹² The parallel to Khomiakov's own sobornost is obvious, and Khomiakov wished to associate the concept of the universality of the Church already existent in its phraseology with his sobornost.

Also crucial in striving to understand sobornost is its connection to the German Catholic Romantic theologian Johann Moehler. Moehler was nine years older than Khomiakov, and published his three major theological works before Khomiakov. Serge Bolshakoff, in his work *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Moehler*, finds direct correlations between Moehler's conception of the unity of the church, and Khomiakov's subsequent organic unity in sobornost. It is known that Khomiakov was familiar with Moehler's great theological writings, and Bolshakoff suggests Khomiakov may have even borrowed Moehler's cunning strategy of debate in his own works.¹³ Bolshakoff expertly points out the unquestionable connection between Khomiakov's sobornost and the writings of Moehler. "Moehler asserts in his opening chapter that we become Christians through the action of the Holy Ghost, who unites all the faithful into one spiritual community, using it as an instrument to enlighten other men outside that community."¹⁴ Particularly important here is the repeated use of the Holy Spirit as the binding force in the Christian community. A stronger connection between these two theologians could not be possible.

The only element seemingly lacking in the parallel between Khomiakov and Moehler is Khomiakov's reliance on love as the foundation of the Church. But again, Moehler seems to have provided at least some of the impetus here as well. In Moehler's

¹² Christoff, *Khomyakov*, pg. 146.

¹³ Serge Bolshakoff, *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Church in the Works of Khomyakov and Moehler* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946), 239.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 241.

own words, “Love is the source of truth. Or, the Christian faith is built by the rays of *holy love*, which elevates the soul, conquers the mind, reflects there and is transformed into ideas.”¹⁵ Not only did Moehler unite the love of the Holy Spirit with the intrinsic wholeness of the Church, as Khomiakov would later, but he also tied it to cognition and the acquisition of ideas.

Although clearly influenced by Moehler, Khomiakov did not simply restate the former’s theories and adopt them wholesale. Moehler’s early conceptions of the Church united in love did exercise strong influence on Khomiakov. Yet, Khomiakov was in disagreement with Moehler regarding the absolute authority of the hierarchy. A tight hierarchical system of Pope, Cardinal, Bishop, etc. with absolute power resting in the hands of one man was too formal and rigid a structure for the anti-authoritarian in Khomiakov. More importantly, Khomiakov’s view of the doctrinal church was fundamentally different. Moehler believed that the Church could naturally develop over time, growing in spirituality. Khomiakov asserted that the Church had always existed in perfection, fully formed, and not requiring any development through the works of man. In Bolshakoff’s words,

To him (Khomiakov) the truth of the faith is known to the Church fully and perfectly because the Spirit of God lives therein. The knowledge of the Church is divine, and not human. Therefore there is no doctrinal development in the Church. Otherwise, it would be lacking in perfection, needing to develop; but the Church itself is the fullness of knowledge and perfection. Khomyakov objected to the theories of Moehler and Newman

¹⁵ Ibid., 242. Quoted from Moehler’s “Die Einheit in der Kirche oder das Prinzip des Katholicismus dargestellt in Geiste der Kirchenvater der drei ersten Jahrhunderte” (Matthias-Gruenwald-Verlag, Mainz, 1925), pg. 18.

about the gradual growth to perfection and logical development of the Church.¹⁶

So while the association between Moehler and Khomiakov cannot be denied, and Moehler's initial formulation of inner unity in the Church cannot be discounted, there are also substantial differences in their ecclesiology, enough to make these two theologians' religious scholarship legitimate in their own right.

Decaying West

But what made the West so unworthy to rule and transform the world? In answering this question, Khomiakov was able to simultaneously attack the West and exalt Russia. This approach was Khomiakov's own way of giving Russia its identity as the leader of Orthodox Slavs, and presenting it as a solution to all the failures of the West. Khomiakov owed much to Western intellectual accomplishments, he was certainly not ignorant of this. Indeed, being an educated aristocrat, he himself was the product of Western learning and knowledge. Yet for him, the West had excelled to a point, but they were dying, spiritually, morally and intellectually. The answer to this decay lay in the spiritual unity and truth of the East that Russia had, and the West had not.¹⁷

Khomiakov essentially considered the operating principles of rationalism and individualism in the West to be spiritually and morally bankrupt. This conviction of the West's decay is crucial to all Khomiakov's writing that was in any way related to the West, and should always be seen through the perspective of this man who remained certain of its impending demise. As such, it is important to address what Khomiakov disagreed with in the West and why. Not only did he feel the West was dying, but he was

¹⁶ Ibid., 260.

¹⁷ Bird, introduction to *On Spiritual Unity*, 14.

convinced their reign over the world was already coming to an end. This was a time of Russian ascendancy in the world. Napoleon's Grand Armé had been defeated a generation ago at the hands of Russian soldiers, and the victory would mark the beginning of one of the strongest periods of Russian nationalism. But along with Russia's increased visibility in the West came increased scrutiny. Khomiakov and the Slavophiles firmly believed that Russia must be renewed by her people. Then, Russia, as the greatest carrier of Orthodoxy, could save the West and bring the whole Christian world back to a meaningful way of life, transforming its culture.¹⁸

Before we can delve into how Khomiakov sought to change the world through Russia, we must first examine why he felt it was necessary. Khomiakov came to these conclusions primarily through the science of ideas, philosophy. It was through the lens of philosophy that Khomiakov found these flaws in Western society, and it was also through his own unique Slavophile philosophy that he developed his theory of Russia as the savior of the West.

Khomiakov saw his Church as the vehicle by which all true knowledge and wisdom flowed. Knowledge was not an individual attainment, it could only be found within the community of the Church. This was completely opposite in the West, which had as one of its primary philosophies Individualism, which dictated that the individual by themselves could, through logical and rational thought, come to understand the world and God. But for Khomiakov, the Church was the ultimate form of community, and individuals who existed outside of it could not find Truth, because it isolated them from this community of the Church. In the words of V. Zenkovsky, from his critical analysis of

¹⁸ V. V. Zenkovsky, *A History of Russian Philosophy: Volume I* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953), 203.

Khomiakov's philosophy, "Reason, conscience and artistic creation-although they may be manifested in the individual human being- are in fact a function of the Church; none of them is ever completely or perfectly realized outside it."¹⁹ In this way, intellectual accomplishment itself like Khomiakov's personal philosophy and his theory of sobornost are brought into the sphere of the Church. Without this incorporation of personal knowledge into the Church, no knowledge would have been intelligible or possible if it had not been united to the Church through the sobornost that bound men, their ideas and the Church together. Clearly this essential community of Truth in the Church was directly tied to sobornost, and Khomiakov can be seen extending his sobornost into the realm of philosophy when dealing with the West.

With the basis of all knowledge flowing from the Church, Khomiakov went further and claimed that when the individual tried to find Truth outside the spiritual sphere, they were doomed to erroneous falsity, and the most obvious and damaging example of that falsity was the Western concept of "rational cognition".²⁰ This was the process whereby an individual could logically collect and analyze thoughts, creating knowledge of the world and religion that was manufactured and not of God. And so, by circumventing the Church in their world view, the bases of Western philosophy rooted in Kant and then Hegel were rendered ineffectual, because they strove to accomplish the impossible: finding Truth outside the Church. In Khomiakov's words, "The truth is inaccessible to individual thinkers, it is accessible only to an aggregate of thinkers bound together by love."²¹ Here we see the other essential component of sobornost, the loving

¹⁹ Ibid., 189.

²⁰ Ibid., 191.

²¹ Khomiakov, *Socheneniya*, Moscow, 1900, VII, pg. 283 quoted from Zenkovsky *History of Russian Philosophy*, 191.

community. Because Hegel and German philosophy explained a culture that existed outside the loving Church, it was a culture that could not stand. Khomiakov felt that the Rationalism of Europe's Enlightenment was striving to replace God with man, and that Individualism preached the individuals' ability to find Truth and meaning in the "outer darkness" outside the Church.

Now that we can more fully see Khomiakov's indictment of the West, we can properly ascertain his solution to these problems. For Khomiakov, the answer lay in the fusion of the moral and the rational within the Church. The West had focused solely on the rational, ignoring the spiritual, moral component to knowledge. The union of these two made faith possible; and faith, for Khomiakov, was another form of knowledge, a spiritual knowledge. Through faith one could truly feel and perceive the world around oneself, and hence it became what Khomiakov referred to as a "living knowledge", and this state of existence was the "wholeness of spirit."²² When put to practice, "living knowledge" culminated in "total reason". Total reason, for Khomiakov, was the antithesis of simple Rationality, which turned the intellect inward on itself, causing collapse.²³ This wholeness of spirit, of existence, could only be found by a Christian believer.

This was the stage of the West's decay. Khomiakov fervently hoped to bring Orthodoxy into this maelstrom and rescue it from destruction. In speaking of Khomiakov's ecclesiastical world-view, Zenkovsky notes, "...the important thing philosophically is not the concrete detail of his critique of the West, but the intense and passionate hope that through Russia Orthodoxy would be able to effect a reorganization

²² Zenkovsky, *Russian Philosophy*, 194-95.

²³ *Ibid.*, 195.

of the whole system of [western] culture.”²⁴ Khomiakov knew that Russia possessed this wholeness of spirit, this essential union of the worldly and the divine in its culture and its Orthodoxy. These two things had become divorced from each other in the West, and that separation ultimately doomed Western society. Khomiakov truly tried to create a “Christian philosophy”, one that required man to strive for Truth within the community of the loving Church, within sobornost.

Another very important reference to this central concept of Christian knowledge is made in Khomiakov’s famous catechetical essay on the Orthodox Church, entitled “The Church is One” (*Tserkov’ Odna*). Because of its overarching qualities as an overview of Khomiakov’s Church views, it will prove very useful throughout this discussion of Khomiakov’s works, but its immediate significance lies in its philosophical discussion on Christian knowledge.

In “The Church is One,” Khomiakov reaffirmed his convictions that the attainment of the wholeness of spirit and total reason could only be accomplished by believers existing within the Church. But Khomiakov went beyond the simple attainment of that Christian knowledge and spoke about not only faithful wisdom, but how to understand the Church. In this case, there were two kinds of people in Khomiakov’s world: believers and non-believers. He argued that only those believers existing within her community, her sobornost, could understand and comprehend the Church. “All of the distinguishing features of the Church, both inner and external, are perceived only by the Church herself and by those whom grace calls to be her members.”²⁵ Only members of

²⁴ Ibid., 203.

²⁵ Aleksei Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, trans. Robert Bird., 32.

the Church community, possessors of true Christian knowledge, could understand her. Again, faith is a requisite to knowledge, just as in his secular philosophical writings.

But what of those outside of the Christian community? “For those who are alien to her and remain uncalled the distinguishing features are incomprehensible...”²⁶ As non-believers they are excluded from true knowledge, and to them external, superficial change (such as in church rituals) could be taken to mean real change. “Those who are outside and not called, however, see and know the changing of external ritual by an external knowledge incapable of grasping the inner...”²⁷ It appears that for Khomiakov, not only all earthly, secular knowledge must originate in the faith of the Church’s community, but all knowledge and understanding of the Church must come from within itself as well.

This prevalence of Church as community had very strong roots in the centuries-old communal structure of the Russian countryside. Khomiakov lived in a time of great idolization of the Russian peasantry. Slavophiles felt the peasantry as a group had preserved the unique cultural traditions of ancient Russians. In the life of the peasant, the Slavophiles found the proto-Russian, the Russian totally unbesmirched by Western life who continued to live within the ancient cycles of Orthodox traditions. The prime example of this was the peasant commune, or *obshchina*. Khomiakov saw a direct equivalent between this shared community in peasant life and the ideal construction of the Church as a community. The communal structure of the peasantry around the Church seemed to verify the Slavophiles’ predilection that the Russian people were somehow hardwired for Christianity, that it was already part of their intrinsic makeup. Because of

²⁶ Ibid., 32.

²⁷ Ibid., 32.

this structure, Khomiakov felt Russians had not, like the West, divided their religious or societal communities into individuals seeking to understand God independently. They had not fallen into the Western trap of cutting the individual off from the community of the Church. Most telling, as Peter Christoff notes in his critical biography of Khomiakov, is that our leading Slavophile would very often use this term, *obshchina*, as a synonym for the Church. It was most effective for Khomiakov because it tied his natural fondness of the Russian peasant commune, or community, with the Church.²⁸ This also makes clear the constant stress on the Christian *community* in Khomiakov's philosophy. Simply put, the community *was* the Church for Khomiakov.

Western Christendom vs. Orthodoxy

We have taken a look at Khomiakov's philosophical justification of the West as unworthy stewards of the world and of Russians as the noble bearers of spiritual Truth, but what was even more an important factor for this religious man was not just Western society, but the state of Western Christendom. If the society of the West was poisoned by an exo-Christian philosophy totally removed from sobornost, how much worse were the Western Churches, Roman Catholic and Protestant, who were an integral part of that society? We will see that Khomiakov believed the Western Churches to be just as desperate and in need of their salvation by Russia and its Orthodoxy.

From this conviction of Orthodoxy's superiority, it follows logically that Khomiakov thought the Orthodox Church had preserved true catholicity. It was a free union of its members in sobornost, not by any one man (i.e. the Pope), who falsely and heretically proclaimed himself infallible without the universal approval in council of all

²⁸ Christoff, *Khomiakov*, pg. 152.

the churches. Therefore, the Western Church "...removed itself from the living unity of the Church."²⁹ Again, love returns as the absolutely vital element, which the West does not understand. "Orators and sages, inquirers into the Lord's love, and preachers have often spoken of the law of love, but not a single one has spoken of the power of love. The peoples have heard the preaching of love as a duty. They have forgotten about love as a divine privilege that guarantees to human beings knowledge of the absolute truth. What the wisdom of the West is ignorant of, the ignorance of the East teaches."³⁰ Khomiakov felt the power of love could not reign in a church amidst the tyranny of one man.

From whence sprung this scorn for the West? Khomiakov's own time was not a peaceful one. He himself fought in the Crimean War, which not surprisingly set Russians against the great Western European powers like France and Great Britain, and no doubt contributed to his world-view. Following from this experience, there was also a more antagonistic side to his theological writings. Khomiakov felt a deep need to defend and clarify his faith which was being attacked by Western European intellectuals, even clergy. In order for Europe to see the Slavophile vision of a Russia that could redeem the West from its iniquities, he foremost had to point out the errors and heresies of the Western communions.

Dealing separately with the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches, Khomiakov tried to pinpoint where they went awry. Since Catholicism preceded Luther and the Reformation, he logically began with the error of false, derived authority (primarily in the embodiment of the Papacy). The dogmas of the West like Papal Infallibility were a consequence of the earthly compulsion to create its *own* truth, outside

²⁹ Bird, introduction to *On Spiritual Unity*, 15.

³⁰ SR, Kh 2, 74-75.

of sobornost and the Church, and hence, these truths were not founded in the Truth of the Church and were ultimately doomed.³¹

Khomiakov did however try to be rational in defending his beliefs. He firmly felt he must write out of necessity to protect that which has been misunderstood and perverted by the West. He did not speak in anger. In his own defense of his personal motives to criticize the West, he said “I have not yet been refuted, and I am now continuing a task I consider a duty, hoping that a word said sincerely and with love will not remain completely useless.”³² In order for him to wage a theological battle with the West, he believed it was necessary to first expunge hatred and prejudice from the heart. Khomiakov also felt history had taught that hatred is endemic and epidemic in society and must be cast out to perceive “divine truth.”³³ Part of this truth, for Khomiakov, was of course the failures of the Western churches.

As the Roman Catholic Church was at the time perhaps one of the most powerful organizations in Western Europe, this was of course a subject Khomiakov had to deal with critically. We find he had plenty in his intellectual arsenal with which to scrutinize the Roman Church. One of Khomiakov’s major works was entitled as a response to remarks by the Archbishop of Paris Marie-Dominique-Auguste Sibour at the start of the Crimean War. In it, the Archbishop of Paris literally called for a holy crusade against the “Photians”.³⁴ Khomiakov was convinced that this was a sign of widespread animosity of

³¹ SR, Kh 2, 76.

³² SR, Kh 2, 72.

³³ SR, Kh 2, 67.

³⁴ SR, Kh 2, 65. The term “Photians” refers to Patriarch Photius of Constantinople, who was the honorary figurehead of the Orthodox Church at the time of the Great Schism of 1054, in using this term, the Archbishop attempted to reduce all Orthodoxy to a kind of cult.

the Western churches against Orthodoxy due to the lack of debate or controversy over the Archbishop's words.³⁵

Khomiakov argued in response that the Roman Catholic Church had removed itself from sobornost, and had violated the free community of Christian love in which the Orthodox Church existed. It had therefore betrayed itself unto death by disconnecting itself from the eternal celestial Church which has always existed. But in order to understand Khomiakov's arguments, it is necessary to briefly delve into Christian doctrine.

Christianity has produced many creeds, but *The Creed* refers to the Nicene Creed, which was written and adopted by the Second Ecumenical Council at Nicea and then received its final form at a successive council at Constantinople. One of the most important clauses states, "And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, which proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son together are worshipped and glorified." The western Church, since at least the 6th Century, had been inserting the Latin *filioque* which would then make the phrase read, "who proceeds from the Father and the Son..."³⁶ This "double-procession" of the Holy Spirit in the theology of the Trinity remains one of the most fundamental dogmatic barriers between the Orthodox and Catholic Churches to this day as well as a factor in the 11th Century Schism.

Khomiakov argued that altering The Creed, which was unanimously adopted by the Ecumenical Councils, led inexorably to the loss of true sobornost in Western Christianity. In Khomiakov's eyes, this living contradiction that the West created in the cornerstone concept of the Trinity led Rome to invent Papal Infallibility to account for

³⁵ Kh, 2, 66-67.

³⁶ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, new ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 50.

the grave sacrilege they had committed.³⁷ Indeed, he stated that the Pope being absolute in spiritual power was closer to the analogy of being possessed by evil spirits than being a true expression of the Apostolic Tradition.³⁸ Also, in defying the nature of the true Church and changing its core beliefs without consulting the Orthodox, the West treated the East as nothing more than a child, a religiously insignificant member of the Christian world.³⁹

Khomiakov was also a historian, and he pointed very effectively to history to bolster his point. In the early Church, Papal Infallibility was a non-issue, and never even discussed between rival Greek and Latin groups. It was a later concept that created centuries of conflict between a Pope wrestling for total control of Western Christendom. Khomiakov then used this first defiant act of the West as the kind of Pandora's Box of schism, once the Catholic Church invented its own independent authority, the Protestant Reformation followed suit in an attempt to create yet another independent structure removed from the body of sobornost.⁴⁰ Khomiakov also found ample evidence of wider Orthodox agreement with sobornost against Papal Infallibility in the contemporary Orthodox Churches of his day. The various Patriarchs of the Orthodox Churches met in 1847 and wrote a response to a Papal Infallibility declaration of Pope Pius IX which states that, "...infallibility resides solely in the universality of the Church united by mutual love...the purity of rite was entrusted not to any hierarchy but to the people of the Church as a whole, which is the body of Christ."⁴¹ Again Khomiakov found a wealth of

³⁷ SR, Kh 2, 68.

³⁸ SR, Kh 2, 73.

³⁹ Nicholas Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles* (Gloucester, Mass: Peter Smith, 1965), 64-65.

⁴⁰ SR, Kh 1, 69.

⁴¹ SR, Kh 1, 59.

support for his concept of sobornost as well as an indictment against Western Christianity in the pages of history and contemporary Orthodox leaders.

Of course, in order to show the rest of Europe the unique potential that Russia offered, Khomiakov couldn't just criticize Catholics. He also had to discredit the other branch of Western Christianity, Protestantism. Khomiakov did not blame Protestantism for what it was, he saw the development of its churches and Luther as an inescapable consequence of the abuses of the Catholic Church; it was the unavoidable resolution of a Catholic Church that ruled with absolute despotic power.⁴²

Just as in sobornost, Khomiakov also created a synthesis between his own ideas and traditional Orthodox teaching when criticizing the Protestant churches. According to the Orthodox Church, she is guided by something called Holy Tradition.⁴³ This Holy Tradition can be seen as consisting of five aspects: Holy Scripture, the Liturgy, the Ecumenical Councils, the Saints, and Church Art.⁴⁴ Khomiakov saw danger and disillusionment in the Protestant churches that essentially take the Bible as the only source for their church. The relationship is different in the Orthodox world that takes Scripture as merely a part of a living Church guided by Holy Tradition. Khomiakov felt that Protestantism had mistakenly replaced the Tradition of the Church with just Scripture, and for Khomiakov this further buttressed Russia's position as the possessor of Truth that would guide the West back from error. The Church is essentially of God, who is pre-existing and eternal. This is where Scripture and tradition find their source. "For

⁴² Edie, *Russian Philosophy*, 235.

⁴³ In Orthodox Church, the Virgin Mary, or Theotokos (from the Greek, literally meaning God-bearer), is given a place of high honor. The Orthodox Church is always referred to as "she", in her honor.

⁴⁴ *The Orthodox Study Bible* New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), iv-vii.

Scripture is written tradition, while tradition is living Scripture.”⁴⁵ This two are inter-related, and cannot be confused or separated because they exist in unity.

The misunderstood nature of prayer in the Western churches was another symptom of their decay. Prayer, Khomiakov argued, was the necessary reaching upwards of the Church and her penitents, with God reaching downwards and accepting their petitions. Prayer was the very blood that flowed through the Church itself. “It is the voice of the Church’s love, the eternal breath of the Divine Spirit.”⁴⁶ This understanding of prayer went beyond logic and is pre-cognitive and all-reaching. We see similar patterns of belief present in his more secular philosophical writings. In a letter to his old friend and fellow Slavophile Yuri Samarin, Khomiakov dissected the seeming hypocrisy inherent in the German-Hegelian philosophical system. Instead of taking this pre-cognitive “spirit” as its basis, German philosophers ignored this deeper truth and took the rationalistic “concept” as the foundation for all further cognitive development.⁴⁷ This is a reiteration of Khomiakov’s indictment against the West. Prayer represented that mystical union of the mind and soul, creating that wholeness of spirit so crucial for man. The lack of that state of being, in both prayer and philosophy, was the reason that intellectual advancement in Western Europe had reached an impasse, because they had based all their theorizations on the falsity of the mind alone, outside of that Christian philosophy necessary for all true knowledge. This afforded yet another way for Khomiakov to show the West as doomed to failure without possessing the truth of the East.

Rationalism was an integral part of Europe, seen by some as one of the Enlightenment’s greatest achievements. However, Khomiakov did not share these views.

⁴⁵ SR, Kh 1, 59.

⁴⁶ SR, Kh 2, 85.

⁴⁷ Edie, *Russian Philosophy*, 231-32.

Although he prized logical thought, for him the path to truth did not lie in the mind, but in the heart. Rationalism did not exist in the true Church. For Khomiakov, Protestantism was inherently individualistic, and at its very essence denied the believer *community*, which was of course one of Khomiakov's essential components to sobornost. The individual was the repository of "sin and ignorance," and could not in itself achieve unity with God.⁴⁸ By putting the individual in charge, without the guidance of the Church, Khomiakov felt that Protestantism left its adherents stranded and unable to connect with one another or with anything spiritual. He blamed the outcomes of this secularization of Western culture as the root of all European problems, and the plague that was killing its very soul. Russia, of course, still preserved true harmony between its ardent faithful and the divine, and had this solution to offer Protestants.

Khomiakov also saw Protestantism's aversion to the Catholic Church reflected in their aversion to certain types of prayer. Along with the disunity he saw amongst their many sects, Khomiakov noted that Protestants fiercely avoided offering prayers to the unseen, spiritual world. He assumed that the practice smacked too much of Catholicism, and was seen as too mystical a concept, not logical enough for the rational minded Protestants. If it can't be seen, it doesn't exist.⁴⁹ For Khomiakov, it was precisely faith in the unseen that was essential for understanding and personal fulfillment. Without trusting something that was not there, true belief was not possible.

He went on to claim that Protestants ask for people to pray for them, foregoing any kind of divine intercession. This was complete folly for Khomiakov, for if you were not offering your prayers to a higher power of some kind, what was the point? For him, it

⁴⁸ SR, Kh 1, 59.

⁴⁹ SR, Kh 2, 79.

was as if Protestants had made a kind of “deal” in prayer; a recognition of a half-truth (the necessity for prayers) but denying the power that prayer can carry with it.⁵⁰

Because, in Khomiakov’s view, prayer was such an important aspect of faith, he also criticized the Western conceptions of faith and its logical theological partner, salvation. Khomiakov was acutely aware of the debate that had raged for centuries in the West over the nature of salvation. Was it achieved through faith alone? Or was it achieved through works and faith together? Such questions were nonsensical to Khomiakov, and he was apparently baffled by the redundancy of these debates. Faith was something organic and integral to all true believers.⁵¹ “We know that faith is alive...and that, if it is not manifested in works...it will no longer be faith, but a mere belief, logical knowledge, or as St. James says, a cadaver.”⁵² The West’s inability to understand the very nature of faith and salvation was all the more reason to Khomiakov that the time for Russia to dispense her saving spiritual truths had come. He indeed was a man in search of a destiny for Russia, and was writing with full faith in his own words.

Khomiakov’s last theological argument that merits discussion concerned the nature of the Eucharist, which, not surprisingly, Khomiakov felt that the West had also misunderstood. Since it was such an integral and central Sacrament in the Orthodox Church, Khomiakov was not willing to leave the subject untouched. Quite simply, he felt that both Protestants and Catholics misinterpreted what Communion was. Protestants, because of their rationalism, had refused to accept the idea of transubstantiation, and had reduced this essential rite into a mere symbolic gesture. Catholics, on the other hand, were entirely focused on the physical means of transformation of the bread and wine.

⁵⁰ SR, Kh 2, 80.

⁵¹ SR, Kh 2, 88.

⁵² SR, Kh 2, 89.

When Khomiakov attempted to explain this to an elderly Orthodox priest once, the old cleric gasped in terror, “In the name of heaven what are they saying? They seem to be taking the body of Christ to mean the meat of Christ!”⁵³ Khomiakov argued that if Christ is truly able to accomplish all things, then the indwelling of the Holy Spirit into the Sacraments is a mystical miracle that occurs, not some chemical transformation that takes place.⁵⁴

Clearly, Khomiakov had mixed motives for his theological writings. For one thing, he felt an obligation to defend the Orthodox Church against scrutiny which he felt it was undeserving of. But Khomiakov also wished to use theology in order to enforce and validate his own theories of common love and sobornost. This was indicative of the central role that religion played in Khomiakov’s life. For this man, if religion did not support and prove his philosophy, it was completely meaningless, as it was outside the Christian philosophy that was the only true knowledge. That was why his personal theories and theology were so closely intertwined.

Perhaps Khomiakov’s attitude towards Western Christianity can best be summed up in his own words. “Individuals are thrown into a desert in Protestantism, whereas they are walled in by Romanism.”⁵⁵ The Protestant churches seemed to eradicate all of the essential Church Tradition that Khomiakov felt was so vital to a full understanding of Christianity. On the other hand, Catholicism had lost the free union of believers –the sobornost- that the Orthodox Church possesses. By creating a hierarchical autocracy, they had destroyed the freedom of individual belief within the Church.

⁵³ SR, Kh 2, 91.

⁵⁴ SR, Kh 2, 91.

⁵⁵ SR, Kh 2, 82.

The Historical Struggle

Khomiakov saw the conflict between West and the Russian East as an epic struggle lasting millennia. The struggle was not only religious, it was also historical. The West had been the oppressors of true freedom since before the Slavs even existed as a people. Khomiakov used history along with theology to paint Western civilization not only as the unworthy tyrants of the world, but also as the antagonists who were destroying the world, not saving it. Khomiakov loved history, but felt that the field had been done a great disservice by its current “experts”. He decided that historians were too scientific, too caught up in the minute details. To be a good historian, one had to be a good artist, a good poet. They had lost the fullness of vision that an artist possesses.⁵⁶ Hence, in 1838, Khomiakov embarked on a decades-long venture to flesh out and follow the destinies of the Western oppressors and freedom-lovers throughout history. The work is referred to only as his *History, or the Semiramis*. It was never completed, although it fills three volumes and was published posthumously.⁵⁷

The goals of the *History* were immense, for Khomiakov’s goal was to find the basic governing trends and struggles that defined the whole history of man and civilization. Khomiakov’s ideas were highly original, and at the same time controversial and a bit fantastical.⁵⁸ The overarching theme of history was that struggle between the two groups of peoples on the planet, what Khomiakov termed the Iranians and the Kushites. The Iranians were lovers of freedom and high moral standards. The Kushites

⁵⁶ Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West*, 68.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

were those who lived by necessity only, and were usually the conquerors and the pillagers.⁵⁹

Naturally, the Slavs were given one of the biggest roles in history, and were of course Iranians. Drawing from myth, religion, history, and literature, Khomiakov saw Slavs in Greek gods and goddesses, he made Troy a Slavic city because of its moral superiority, and went even farther to say that in the early history of the world the Slavs had been the dominant ethnic group, widely dispersed throughout the known world. They were eventually pushed out by their polar opposite, the Kushites.⁶⁰ In the end, the Slavs could not persevere in Europe because of the higher ideals of freedom and love by which they lived. Their way of life was incompatible with the brute force of the Kushites, and because of this the Iranians and the Kushites had been in a constant war of life philosophy since the beginning of time.⁶¹

Clearly a product of the Romantic Era of literature and grounded more in personal feeling and conviction than fact⁶², the History obviously has much insight to offer us into the mind of Khomiakov. We see the theological war translated throughout time as the Slavs are embodied as eternal protectors of freedom and love which found its ultimate culmination in Christianity and sobornost. Khomiakov's vision of a Russia, righteous in spirit and possessing the solution to Europe's woes, was augmented by his attempt to take this role of Russia to times before a Russian state even existed. It was as if this was always to be the destiny of the Russian people, and Khomiakov was working to herald the culmination of Russia's calling to take her place as first among civilizations in world

⁵⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 71-73.

⁶¹ Ibid., 74.

⁶² Ibid., 74.

history. Understanding what made the West unworthy both historically and religiously was just as important for Khomiakov as understanding what Russia then had to do about it. It was now time for Russia to take up her mission and become the savior of the world.

Russia's Sacred World Mission

If Russia was already ideally suited to Orthodox Christianity, and the West was in dire need of its wisdom and salvific Grace, then it followed naturally that Khomiakov saw Russia as having a sacred role, a holy mission, to the rest of the world. And indeed, this was the case. Khomiakov was not, however, a fiery zealot of Russian nationalism. He both recognized Russia's potential to become the world's greatest nation and save mankind, as well as the realities of Russia's many harsh realities and shortcomings. Of great importance in understanding Khomiakov's complex attitudes towards Russian holiness and depravity, his poetry is most beneficial.

Not atypically, the Romantic movement of Slavophilism saw no lack of poetry. Khomiakov was himself a poet and playwright, and these more artistic efforts fill a volume of his eight volume collected works. When dealing with the emotionally charged issue of the Russian state, poetry was very useful for Khomiakov. His most famous summation of Russia's contradictory nature and holy mission can be found in his poem, "To Russia." After its distribution, it caused such an uproar among political circles that Khomiakov was asked to submit all further poetry to the St. Petersburg censor for approval.⁶³ The fervor in his poetry was generated by the outbreak of war in the Crimea

⁶³ Andrej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1989), 186.

in 1854, and Khomiakov saw this as both a chance for Russia to awake from its laziness and manifold errors, but also in this acknowledgement renew herself.⁶⁴

Smeared with dark injustice in the law courts,
And branded with the mark of slavery:
Full of godless flattery, foul lies,
Of deadly apathy and vice,
And every other known depravity!⁶⁵

It is no small wonder that Khomiakov received a serious reprimand at this first stanza. Not only did he criticize Russia on the behavioral level of laziness and incontinence, he also directly attacked the government's judicial system, and the deeply entrenched serfdom that enslaved the majority of Russians to a lifetime of toil and labor. The rest of the poem, having admonished Russia, calls for her to purify herself and take up its holy mission in the world.

Oh, unworthy to be chosen,
Yet you were chosen. Cleanse yourself swiftly,
In the waters of repentance,
Lest a twofold punishment
Should fall like a thunderbolt on your head.

Your soul in meek obedience,
Your head covered with ashes,
Devote yourself to humble prayer
And bathe the wounds of a depraved conscience
In the holy balm of tears.

Then, arise, faithful to your mission,

⁶⁴ Ibid., 186-7.

⁶⁵ Christoff, *Khomiakov*, 106.

And hurl yourself into the thick of bloody battles!
Fight with cunning for your brethren,
Bear aloft God's banner with firm grasp,
And smite with the sword- God's sword.⁶⁶

This sense of mission, fighting on the side of God, was of more importance to Khomiakov. While it is fair to say that Khomiakov's patriotism outweighed his criticism of his country, it should still be noted that he was not merely a nationalist who longed for Russian world supremacy, but someone who longed for a re-birth of Russian spirituality that would transform his country into what it was destined to become, the savior of the world.

R. McNally, in his insightful article dealing with leaders of the Westernizers and Slavophiles (Chaadaev and Khomiakov, respectively) elucidates a number of pertinent opinions of Khomiakov on the role of Russia's past in its future journey and mission to the world. He points out that Khomiakov believed Russia's past to be a treasure trove of virtues and lessons for the modern Russian people. Ancient Rus' essentially had good social order and religious purity. The only thing that was lacking was a larger understanding of their own identity. These ancient forerunners of Russians had no concept of who they were as a people, no collective consciousness.⁶⁷ Peter the Great's modernization of Russia resulted in a collective consciousness, albeit paid for dearly with having to compromise its pure Orthodox values with the Western ones that were then seeping in through contact with Europe at large.

⁶⁶ Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 187, translated from the Russian in Khomyakov, *Stikhotvoreniya*, ed. by Frantsev, (Prague, 1934) pg. 118-119.

⁶⁷ Raymond T. McNally, "Chaadaev Versus Xomjakov in the Late 1830's and 1840's," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jan-March 1966), 73-91. pg. 78.

In reviewing Russian history as a positive path taken by Russians towards manifesting their own destiny, Khomiakov insisted that it was absolutely necessary to look back into that past to understand how to proceed in modern times. And of course, the roots of Russia's past were seated in its Orthodoxy taken from the Byzantine Empire. This is where the Westernizing Chaadaev differed from Khomiakov. Chaadaev wanted Khomiakov to recognize Russia's inferiority and adopt wholesale importation of Western culture into Russia. He remained leery of Russian Orthodoxy's role. Khomiakov understood the merit of Western technology and thought, and that Russia should continue to use it, but that it should simultaneously revitalize its own Orthodoxy in order to achieve its destiny.⁶⁸ Khomiakov asserted that Russians must first get in touch with their own pure historical, Orthodox roots and understand their meaning for society, only then could they move forward with their mission to the West.⁶⁹ In other words, Russia's historical, intrinsically good nature must be freed from the encroachment of modernity, which came as a result of the Petrine reforms. Then a renewed, cleansed Orthodox Russia would be free to pursue its calling to a deeply flawed and sick West.

Russia and Other Slavs

Having already established Khomiakov's offensive attitude towards the Protestant and Catholic West, in the same spirit it would be very useful to examine how Khomiakov felt about the other Slavic peoples of the world. Historians do not ascribe to Khomiakov and his followers the title "Russophile". Indeed, where is the "Slav" in Slavophile? Khomiakov was of course deeply sympathetic to the plight of other Slavic peoples in

⁶⁸ Ibid., 89-91.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 80.

Eastern Europe. He saw in his brother Slavs, especially the Orthodox ones found predominantly in the Balkans, allies in his fight against the West, and fellow carriers of the Orthodoxy which would transform the world.⁷⁰ A “Slav Beneficent Society” was even set up in Moscow in 1846 to help raise money in aid for these Southern Orthodox in the Balkans.⁷¹ In his trip abroad in 1847, Khomiakov was most warmly received by the Austrian Slavs, and found himself even more at home with the Czechs in Prague. He spent a considerable amount of time with Vaclav Hanka, one of the main proponents of Czech nationalism and pan-Slavism. This Slavic fervor was soon to be crystallized in the All-Slavic conference of 1848.⁷² Unfortunately, no one from the Slavophile camp would attend.

Not only would none of the Slavophiles attend, but the two movements of Pan-Slavism and Slavophilism, while clearly mutually sympathetic to the other, were quite separate. While many Russian intellectuals would travel to their western Slav brethren and catalogue their impressions and ideas⁷³, their impact was quite minimal. Indeed, as Janko Lavrin notes in his considerations of *Khomyakov and the Slavs*, the Pan-Slavism movement outside of Russia was propelled by political motives. Freeing themselves from external tyranny (as the case with the Balkans), creating a national culture (as with the Czechs) and uniting under one banner were their aims.⁷⁴ In the words of Lavrin, “But the paradox of it all was that neither the Catholic Slavs in Austria nor even the Orthodox

⁷⁰ Janko Lavrin, “Khomyakov and the Slavs,” *Russian Review*, vol 23. No. 1 (Jan. 1964), 35-48. pg. 45

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 38

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 45

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

Slavs in the Balkans were able to take any real interest in the Slavophile quasi-mystical theory of Orthodoxy.”⁷⁵

The Slavophiles perhaps were too heavy-handed in dealing with other Slavic peoples. An appropriate and oft used metaphor is the “big brother” mentality of many Russians, Slavophiles included. While all Slavic peoples shared a common historical heritage and in some cases a common religious identity, Russia was clearly the eldest and greatest of all the Slavs. As the dominant Slavic nation, it was the duty of the big brother Russia to watch over and protect her lesser Slavic brethren.

An interesting foray into this mentality of how the western Slavs should behave themselves and the Slavophiles perception of other Slavs can be found in Khomiakov’s *Message from Moscow*, addressing the Serbians on their liberation from the ‘infidel’ Ottoman Empire. The entire letter is permeated with didacticism. In the opening, he congratulates them on their victories, but also exhorts them to be good examples to other nations. “Much have you received, brothers, by the Grace of the Lord God these last years: freedom from the unbearable yoke of a wild and unbelieving people; independence and uniqueness in the dealings of society... the possibility of the development of intellect, morality and spirituality, in accordance with our enlightened Christianity, and finally, the possibility to promote the good, well-being of your lesser brothers by your instruction and example.”⁷⁶ Again, the vehicle for true transformation of their society lies in the Orthodoxy of the Serbs, which must be cultivated together with intellectual pursuits. In a way, this letter serves as a kind of prototype roadmap for Khomiakov in any nation seeking to renew itself like Russia.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 46.

⁷⁶ Aleksei Khomiakov, “K Serbam. Posilaniye iz Moskvii,” in *Izbranniye Socheneniya*, ed. Prof. Arseniev, (New York: Chekhov Publishing House, 1955), 172.

But in accordance with Khomiakov's Russian biases as the shepherd of all Slavs, he was compelled to remind them that it was not their heroism alone that resulted in victory. He continues, "These happy gains you have achieved through true courage, but partly also by the participation and sympathy of the Russian people, with whom you share the same blood and faith..."⁷⁷ Here is the conspicuous reminder that the Serbs were not alone in their victory, it was also accomplished through their fellow Orthodox in Russia. Even though Khomiakov in his instruction to the Serbs could be characterized as pedantic, he was also, as we will see, characteristically critical of Russia.

We have already discussed how Khomiakov felt about the Westernization of Russian culture, this letter is the perfect opportunity to see his philosophy in action. Khomiakov essentially warned the newly-independent Serbs of the dangers of modern statehood and the potential pitfalls. The worst of these sins was pride. Khomiakov first reminded the Serbs of the spiritual pride inherent in Western culture, and the terrible consequences of that pride. Instead of benefiting the rest of humanity, the West had become "...enemies of mankind, always ready to seize land and enslave other peoples. This bitter experience is all too clear to the Slavs; indeed in the whole world the ships of the European people are considered not the messengers of happiness, but the messengers of war and great calamity."⁷⁸ This pride was a damning quality, one of the worst of the West's iniquities. The issue of pride on the part of the West will return later in Khomiakov's correspondence with the English theologian William Palmer.

Russia was not immune to these grave sins and potential pitfalls of creating a society. Russia had already thrown off the bonds of tyranny that kept her from freedom,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 176.

and it was time for Russia to instruct the Serbs in the dangers of this success. “Relating to you, our brothers, with the full openness of love, we cannot hide our faults. The Russian land, after many heavy trials of invasion from the East and West, by the mercy of God was freed from its enemies, spreading to the far ends of the Earth, from the Baltic to the Pacific Oceans, and became the vastest of all modern states.”⁷⁹ This was all well and good, but the danger for the Russians, just as for the Serbs, was what they did once they had liberated themselves. “Strength engenders pride; and when the influence of Western Enlightenment distorted the structure of ancient Russian life, we forgot to give thanks to God, and forgot humility, without which no man or people can receive His mercy...”⁸⁰ This is the perfect encapsulation of Khomiakov’s theory of a Slavic State. While being favored by God with its Orthodoxy, Russia had betrayed that favor and fallen into the errors of the West. And as we have already seen, Khomiakov believed the next step was to understand their holy past and return to it. They could return to that wholeness of spirit, that perfect union of the community of the Church and its people, free from Western concepts of the self. Only then could they take up “God’s sword” and bring Orthodox Christian Truth to all people. Russia was soon to be on its way, and from its example, their Slavic brothers like the Serbs could follow and help transform the world.

All these examples represent a few ways in which Khomiakov worked to define what Russia was in light of the rest Europe. For Khomiakov, she was something made wholly unique and different by the Orthodox Church. Orthodoxy for Khomiakov was the repository of truth from which he could both understand Russia’s existence and prove to the rest of the world that Russia offered the answer to Europe’s intellectual and moral

⁷⁹ Ibid., 177.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 177.

fallacies. Communion with God, what Russia still possessed and the West desperately needed to survive, was the sobornost that Khomiakov created to re-invent Orthodox theology, reveal the fullness of Russia's teaching, and show Europe that the path to truth lay through the Orthodox East. He also used history extensively to bolster these theological arguments and prove the Slavs (and Russians in particular) as worthy inheritors of this truth that would lead the West to salvation. As Russia today is once again free to practice its theology and religion, these arguments that Khomiakov made in the 19th century may become just as invaluable to future generations of Russians who will look back once again to its history and its culture to find the identity and purpose that they, and perhaps all nations, search for.

Chapter II: Khomiakov and William Palmer

It was often said by Khomiakov's contemporaries, both fellow Slavophiles and intellectual adversaries, that the man was often at the height of his intellectual prowess in the heat of debate. It was interaction with his fellow philosophers that motivated and inspired him. In fact, often his friends would have to force Khomiakov to write down the ideas he had formulated during discussion. It is in this light that Khomiakov's long correspondence with the English theologian William Palmer should be viewed. It is a rare opportunity for those of us in today's world, so far removed from the currents of 19th century Russian society, to see Khomiakov in his natural element; that of debate. Since childhood, Khomiakov held a certain affinity for English language and culture; indeed, he spoke it fluently, and the correspondence was conducted entirely in English. This acquaintance, began by sheer chance, blossomed into a friendship and an intellectual and ideological discourse which lasted ten years, from 1844 to 1854. Khomiakov's death occurred in 1860, and this period in his intellectual career puts him at the pinnacle of his strength and formulations of theory.

What makes this exchange even more valuable is the insight it provides. Neither of these men was writing for an audience, merely to one another. Although there is a great deal of 19th Century Victorienesque over-politeness and rigidity, Khomiakov and Palmer inspire each other to think critically when challenged by an equally great mind. Palmer came from an Anglican background and appears as the spiritual seeker, searching for an earthly solution to his spiritual quest for spiritual, ultimate Truth. For Khomiakov, of course, truth had already been found. And the absolutism and total surety of his words

bespeaks of his unshakable faith, attested to by all who knew him. Perhaps this did make Khomiakov a bit inflexible in his intellectual abilities, but nevertheless he was able to engage Palmer in a theological discussion that remains salient today.

The correspondence itself can be a forum in which to observe and interpret Khomiakov's theology. This collection of letters represents a chance to look at how Khomiakov's bedrock theological principles affected his views on the variety of religious issues he and Palmer were to debate. Khomiakov's foundational principles of the Christian Church were twofold. The first was that the Church must be and is internally free in its essence and beliefs, even if not externally free in deed. The second was that the Church exists in its fullness as a supra-organizational organism¹ with God Himself at its head, and as such is totally immune to error.

From these core elements of Khomiakov's belief system, everything else flowed. The theological dialogue between the two would roughly follow the roles of Palmer as the challenger and Khomiakov the defender of Orthodoxy. This chapter analyzes Khomiakov's belief system and examines how it led to his concept of a two-layered conception of the Church. Within this framework it examines the following issues between Palmer and Khomiakov: the possibility of unity in the Christian world, missionary work on the part of the Orthodox Church in the West, the nature of Western European society, the relationship between the Church and State in Russia, and the Sacrament of Baptism in the Orthodox Church. Embedded within these arguments I also

¹ Andrej Walicki also in part concurs in the sense that he felt Khomiakov believed the Church to be a "supra-individual organic whole," in regards to the freedom of the Church in Andrej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka, (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1989), 197.

examine Palmer's own psyche, and where his problems in Orthodoxy lay, and why he was ultimately unable to join the Orthodox communion.

Khomiakov's interesting family background and his setting in 19th Century Russia have already been explored in the previous background. While we will undoubtedly uncover much more in dealing with this correspondence, it is very important to likewise place William Palmer in the context of his surroundings. William Palmer (1811-1879) was the son of a priest and a Fellow of Magdalen College at Oxford, England from the time Khomiakov became acquainted with him. We will soon see Palmer was very open to new religious doctrines and theology, particularly those of the Orthodox Church. Nevertheless, he was an active member of the Anglican Church prior to this, and was even an ordained deacon.

But why Palmer's interest in Russia and particularly its Church? Palmer was involved in a religious movement in England called the Oxford Movement. The essential tenets of the group concerned the status of the major branches of Christianity. They prescribed a so-called Three Branch Theory, which stated that the whole Christian world could be divided into three categories. There was the Catholic Church based in Rome, the Orthodox Churches of the East, and not surprisingly the Anglican Church of England. These three churches had been separated and estranged through history and time, yet they all adhered to the essential doctrines of the Christian faith, and were in essence in communion with one another as the inheritors of Christ's True Church. Palmer took this to mean that whenever a member of any of these particular Churches was in the jurisdiction of the other, by nature the local Church became the embodiment of the True Church for the stranger, even if in a foreign land, and hence the visitor became a part of

it, and was accorded all the Sacraments of that local Church as a consequence of these three branches' invisible unity.²

Palmer's first encounter with Russia was on a religious mission for inter-Christian unity. His mission was simple, as an active communicant of the Anglican Church, he wished to travel to the Russian Church and ask permission to receive the Eucharist, or Communion in an Orthodox Church. By receiving Communion in a Russian Church administered by an Orthodox clergy, he would thereby prove the Oxford Movement's theory of the interconnectedness of the Anglican and Orthodox world. Unfortunately for Palmer, the Russian hierarchs heard his arguments with quixotic bafflement, not at all willing to allow a strange foreigner who was not a Baptized Orthodox Christian receive their highest Sacrament, and summarily denied his request. His remembrances and recollections of this his first trip to Russia were published as *Notes of a Visit to Russian Church in the Years 1840, 1841*.

Palmer obviously harbored a close affinity to the Orthodox Church for many years, and had considered joining the Orthodox Communion several times in his life. It is very important to see Palmer in this light throughout the correspondence. As an interested spectator and potential convert to Orthodoxy, Palmer was given the intellectual opportunity to engage a highly literate, educated scholar of the Russian Church, Aleksei Khomiakov, on theological issues in the Orthodox Church that Palmer disagreed with. Khomiakov was not an "insider" in the Russian Church, so to speak. He was a layman, and not a Church official or ordained priest or deacon. This was ideal for Palmer in a

² A short encapsulation of this theory and Palmer's place in it can be found in the insightful, albeit biased, Preface to *Notes of a Visit to the Russian Church in the Years 1840, 1841*, (London: Kegan Paul and Trench & Co. 1882) written by Palmer's friend, the Catholic Cardinal Newman who compiled Palmer's notes, as well as Edmund G. Cook, "Russia and the West in the Ecclesiology of Khomyakov" (master's thesis, The Ohio State University, 1978), 63.

world of State dominance of the Church in Russia. Khomiakov was free to say whatever he pleased about the nature of the Orthodox Church without fear of retribution from the highly oppressive censorship of Nicholas I's Russia.

So, with the correspondence as a theological platform for debate, Palmer continually challenged Khomiakov on matters of the Orthodox Church. Khomiakov adamantly defended Palmer's charges and leveled very many accusations of his own against the West, but all within the context of Orthodoxy. You can truly sense Palmer's interest and attraction towards Orthodoxy together with his many reservations. It is clear that Palmer did consider conversion to the Orthodox Church a number of times, and many of the issues he raised were problems in the Orthodox faith that were keeping him from converting. If Palmer, a man of intellect and faith, was to convert to Orthodoxy, he would have to be absolutely convinced that it was an embodiment of the whole Christian Church, he could have no moral or dogmatic issues with Orthodoxy. Palmer raised a series of deficiencies and errors that he saw, and these issues ultimately kept him from joining the Orthodox Church. Palmer, for various reasons we shall discuss, was very attracted to the Catholic Church as well, and in the end converted to Catholicism in 1855, dying in Rome in 1879.

There were, of course, many levels on which the correspondence between William Palmer and Alexei Khomiakov operated. The breadth of topics ranged from debate about the role of the Russian State in the Orthodox Church to issues with the Sacrament of Baptism. Yet throughout these diverse crosscurrents of thought, larger themes of Khomiakov's personal philosophy can be seen spanning the band of theological dialogue in his letters.

One of these major themes concerned the very nature of the Church, and was directly tied to Khomiakov's supra-organizational Church. Khomiakov very often referred to the Church in a context beyond that of jurisdictions, be they Protestant, Catholic or Orthodox. "The Church," for Khomiakov, was something else entirely. It was beyond organization, beyond individuals or hierarchs. It was a far greater conception of the Christian Church, and involved a distinct separation in the Church which is critical for all understanding of Khomiakov's theology. The Church was divided into two categories: the church *visible*, and the church *invisible*. P. K. Christoff, in his critical work on Khomiakov's life and writings, points out that it was in the "higher" or metaphysical realm of the church invisible in which Khomiakov preferred to dwell. Man's impact on the church visible, particularly on the Orthodoxy which Khomiakov tirelessly defended, had been at times negative due to Mankind's flawed nature and did not fully reflect the fullness of the Church.³ E.G. Cook, in his Master's Thesis on the Ecclesiology of Khomiakov, also stresses Khomiakov's conviction that the Church visible was merely the historical product of God's revelation to Man, and as a historical product of Man was inferior to the eternal Truth of the Church invisible.⁴ Khomiakov separated these two manifestations of the Church to preserve his concept of the unerring, perfect existence of the Church in his writings with Palmer.

This separation of the Church into two aspects was only necessary for a humanity living in the earthly world. In God's eyes, the Church was truly unified, and without separation. While Khomiakov needed the crucial separation between the two aspects of the Church to keep it spotless and pure, he ran into a great risk of sacrificing the Church's

³ Peter K. Christoff, *An Introduction to Nineteenth-Century Russian Slavophilism*, vol. 1, A. S. Xomjakov (The Hague, Netherlands: Moutin & Co., 1961), 147-148.

⁴ Cook, *Ecclesiology of Khomyakov*, 85-86.

unity. Therefore Khomiakov was quick to point out, in the second paragraph of his systematized ecclesiological essay “The Church is One,” “Only with respect to humanity is it possible to accept the division of the Church into visible and invisible: her unity, in contrast, is true and absolute...Therefore, when it is said: ‘The Church visible and invisible’-that is said only with respect to humanity.”⁵ But how to explain this paradox of an unerring Church that was totally united, yet separate and partially invisible to her members, those who constituted the earthly Church that everyone could see?

It is by faith...that she [the Church] abides on the earth invisible to the eyes of flesh and to minds that are wise in the way of the flesh within the visible community of Christians, just as she remains visible to eyes of faith in the Church beyond the grave, which is invisible to bodily eyes. It is through faith that again that the Christian knows that the earthy Church-though she be invisible-is always robed in a visible image; that there has never been, could never be, and will never be such a time when the sacraments would be distorted, holiness exhausted, and the doctrine spoiled... The Holy Church confesses and believes that the flock has never been deprived of its Divine Pastor and that the Church could never fall into error through misunderstanding, for in her there lives the reason of God; nor could the Church ever submit to false doctrines out of cowardice, for in her there lives the strength of the Spirit of God.⁶

So, in keeping with his doctrine of the Church’s infallibility, Khomiakov needed to elevate the plane of argument about the Western and Eastern Churches to the metaphysical. By doing this the major problems of the Orthodox Church in his day were

⁵ Aleksei Khomiakov, “The Church is One,” in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader*, eds. and trans. Boris Jakim and Robert Bird (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

overcome; and as we will see Khomiakov was able to ascribe blame to what he saw as the temporary errors of the people, the individuals, who harbored the religion. Thus the living organism of the Church was spared any error. This holistic approach to Orthodoxy, moving religion away from individuals or cultures in effect widened the perception of Orthodoxy to a more abstract level. In the context of Khomiakov's theological debate with Palmer, this was very convenient. From this perspective, Orthodoxy, which was for Khomiakov the One True Church, when viewed from these mighty heights could never, by its very nature, be in error.

In typical Khomiakovian fashion, these conceptualizations of the Church were generated through debate. It began with Palmer as the instigator, in his response to Khomiakov's first letter. Palmer charged Khomiakov's Orthodox Church with a serious lack of missionary zeal, rendering it incapable of fulfilling the Church's sacred mission given by Christ to the Apostles to "...go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."⁷ This was the first of many of Palmer's doubts about the vitality and integrity of Orthodoxy, doubts which prevented him from converting. Palmer asked that if the Orthodox world was utterly convinced that it held the "whole of the true church," then why not more zeal to bring all fractions of the Christian Church back to the Eastern Orthodox Faith?⁸

Palmer took this a step further, and concluded that this lack of missionary zeal proved that Orthodoxy was merely a "particular church", and not the sole inheritor of

⁷ Gospel of Matthew, 28:19 (NKJV).

⁸ Palmer to Khomiakov, 4 June 1845, in *Russia and the English Church During the Last Fifty Years, Containing a Correspondence between Mr. William Palmer Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford and M. Khomiakoff, in the years 1844-1854*, ed. W. J. Birkbeck (London: Rivington, Percival & Co., 1895), 18-19.

Truth and hence the True Church.⁹ This concept of “Truth” can essentially be tied to the legitimacy of a church. If a church did possess Christian Truth, it could legitimately claim to be a viable branch of the original Church founded by the Apostles. The question here revolved around the issue of exclusivity. Palmer did not believe that Orthodoxy alone possessed this legitimacy, it possessed it together with the other major Christian confessions, which were also in Palmer’s view viable Churches. However inconsequential the church visible was for Khomiakov, for Palmer, the Church on earth must be a witness to the faith, and that of course implied real action, and not just debate. It was the preeminent existence of a missionary mentality in the Catholic Church which was for Palmer an essential attribute to any church that claimed to be the True Church.¹⁰ This mandatory physical component for Palmer was crucial for any True Church which existed, however temporally, here on Earth. In his words, “Individual members of the One True Church may be wanting in zeal to teach and convert the nations- but the Body as a whole, and the very many of its members, will always have and show forth, *even in the eyes of the world*, the spirit of its mission.”¹¹

Simply acknowledging this major problem with Orthodoxy was not enough for Palmer, and he moved further and charged the Eastern Church with dereliction of its mission; that is, of course, if the Eastern Church was indeed the sole inheritor of Truth in the Christian world. Palmer demanded that the Orthodox Church either state categorically that it was the sole True Church in all its fullness, apologize, and take up its commission with zeal, or admit that it was only a part of the True Christian confession, and say, “We have done wrong and inconsistently in pretending so long to be the whole, when we have

⁹ Palmer to Khomiakov, 1 July 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 47. emphasis my own.

not the necessary attributes of the whole, and know very well that we are only a part....”¹² It was not nearly sufficient for Palmer for members of the Eastern Church to, in his opinion, sit back and point the proverbial finger at the West without sending any real missionaries to minister to their spiritual error.¹³

Palmer truly felt Orthodoxy to possess the fullness of a legitimate Church, but only a single manifestation of the Church in a particular part of the world, certainly not the only possible means to Christian Salvation. Again, Palmer believed “...that you know in your own consciences –that the Eastern Church herself knows in her own conscience– that yours is only a particular Church, not exclusively the Catholic Church; and that the West, though it may have erred, yet has not vitally and essentially apostatized from the Faith.”¹⁴ It was almost as if Palmer earnestly and secretly wished Orthodoxy would take up a mission of evangelization in the West, solving his own internal crisis that he could not join a church which was not a sufficient world witness. In these accusations we can already see an insurmountable obstacle for Palmer with ever joining the Orthodox Church. Perhaps Palmer himself best summed up the perspective of a Westerner looking out to Orthodoxy. “If you seem dead, you may be sure that you will exercise no influence on us; we shall look more and more to Rome, which is evidently active and alive.”¹⁵

The gauntlet had been thrown, so to speak, and Khomiakov throughout the correspondence was more than capable of eloquently defending his Church. Indeed, Khomiakov himself could never be accused of a general lack of zeal when writing about all things religious and theological, and the difference between Palmer’s usually detached

¹² Ibid., 50.

¹³ Palmer to Khomiakov, 2 June 1845, in *Russia and the English Church*, 20.

¹⁴ Palmer to Khomiakov, 1 July 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 43.

¹⁵ Ibid., 51.

English sobriety and Khomiakov's regularly fiery rhetoric is an amusing example of the restrained world of British etiquette and the emotionally charged world of Khomiakov's Slavophiles. Nevertheless, Khomiakov and Palmer were both passionate about the Christian Church, and it is clear that even through their most scathing condemnations of each other's societies and churches that they sincerely desired reconciliation and a unity of world Christianity, even if the terms for such a union were mutually unacceptable.

Khomiakov remained the more skeptical of the two in terms of future unity in the Christian world. In his first letter to Palmer in December of 1844, he clearly stated that his hopes for Christian unity grew dimmer as he aged and saw the, for him, insurmountable obstacles that blocked the way. He believed the natural path for Western Protestantism to take would be to seek a union with Rome. As E. G. Cook points out, Khomiakov was careful to differentiate between the words 'union' and 'unity'.¹⁶ Union with a political entity like the Catholic Church was possible for the Western confessions, specifically Palmer's Anglicanism. Since the external, political operations of the Catholic Church operated like a state, and would allow unions that surmounted to inconsistencies and negations of Church doctrine, union was possible for England and Rome.¹⁷ But this was merely a coming together of two erroneous factions of the Christian West, not true reconciliation, and would be possible only because of the inherent errors of both churches. The internal purity of Orthodoxy and her doctrine was the sole solution for

¹⁶ Edmund G. Cook, "Russia and the West in the Ecclesiology of Khomyakov" (master's thesis, The Ohio State University, 1978), 74.

¹⁷ Khomiakov to Palmer, 10 Dec. 1844, in *Russia and the English Church*, 7-8. Khomiakov specifically points to churches that belonged to the Unia, a group of Eastern Rite Churches who accepted the supremacy of Rome and the Pope, but refused to change their rites or other fundamental East-West differences like the use of the Filioque in the Constantinopolitan Creed. Khomiakov felt this kind of existent hypocrisy and inconsistency of doctrine was unacceptable for the unencumbered Orthodox world which had no theocracy in the form of Papism, but possible for a Roman Church which had already fatally compromised itself as a True Church of pure doctrine.

Khomiakov. It was the crucial doctrinal errors in the Catholic Church, particularly with regards to Creed and the *Filioque* (see discussion in previous chapter) that prevented true Unity. Therefore a Union for Orthodox (in Khomiakov's view), meant something different. "Union cannot be understood by any Orthodox otherwise than as the consequence of a complete harmony, or of a perfect *Unity of Doctrine*."¹⁸ That Unity of Doctrine did not exist, and made the union of the internally pure Orthodox Church with the Catholic Church whose inner theology was flawed impossible.

It is obvious that union and unity meant something altogether higher and different for Khomiakov, but that in the end there was only one option for any future with a united Christianity. "Union is possible with Rome. Unity alone is possible with Orthodoxy."¹⁹ Khomiakov was unmoving in his stance of the universality and exclusivity of Orthodoxy for world Christianity. It was the West who must repent and rejoin the East. There was no other option.

If Orthodoxy was the only option for the West if it wanted to save itself and achieve Christian unity, what of the charges leveled against the East? Khomiakov swiftly questioned the seemingly essential need for Orthodox missionaries to the West. He saw no need for missionaries because a mission of any kind to the West would be ineffectual and unnecessary. Khomiakov essentially asked, does not the West already know of the Good News of the Gospel? Do they not know the Scriptures just as well, if not better, than the Russians? The Christian message was already brought to the West long ago, what would Orthodox missionaries accomplish except a restatement of that same Good

¹⁸ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 8.

News?²⁰ The West by its very nature is incapable of embracing Orthodoxy, chiefly because of its longtime sentiments of “pride and disdain” towards the East.²¹ The haughty West would be required to perform a practically inhuman gesture of humility and grace if it were to rejoin Christian Truth in Orthodoxy, and Khomiakov was convinced this Herculean labor was something nearly impossible for a pride-ridden West that has so long been absolutely convinced of its own superiority.

But it was perhaps a little too convenient for Khomiakov to argue that evangelizing the West was completely unnecessary, since the Orthodox Church at the time had no missions in the West. A real presence of Orthodoxy in the Christian West would be something coveted by a man like Khomiakov, so convinced of Orthodoxy’s superiority, but since there was no such example to point to, it was easier for him to refute its worth instead of coming to terms with the lack of missionary activity towards other Christians. Perhaps Khomiakov himself was guilty of the pride he spoke of repeatedly. For Khomiakov it was the impossibility of a prideful West admitting its spiritual failure that blocked the way toward reconciliation, this admittance was too “...bitter and repulsive to the pride from which no man is free.”²² But Khomiakov was equally unwilling (or perhaps unable) to admit Orthodoxy’s shortcomings. Once again, Khomiakov in his arguments retreated to the moral high ground, claiming the West was to blame.

We can already see Khomiakov’s defiant, anti-West, but more importantly anti-organizational views. Rome was too much of a political and bureaucratic entity. Aside from the doctrinal points of contention that Khomiakov had with the Catholic Church,

²⁰ Khomiakov to Palmer, 8 Aug. 1845, in *Russia and the English Church*, 29-30.

²¹ Ibid., 28.

²² Ibid., 38.

again and again he came out against the church in her visible form. It was humanity's imperfections that had scarred the Church for Khomiakov, and the more entangled any earthly church got in the affairs of the world, the more unworthy that church became. This condition for Khomiakov had reached its apex in the West, with both Protestantism and Catholicism having as its core beliefs the poisonous ideals of rationalism and individualism. These two bedrock Western philosophies, Khomiakov felt, tried to place an imperfect humanity at the helm of the church, thus displacing God. Khomiakov was shocked that the West actually believed that they were responsible for their own salvation, and that it was not ultimately in the hands of God and His Church. This is why Khomiakov mercilessly cut down the churches whose visible, earthly presence had become too concrete, too self-assured and too corrupt. It appears to me that the ultimate danger for any church in Khomiakov's view was one in which a sinful humanity tried to control its own destiny; although it was only a natural impulse of man, it was a lethal one of which Khomiakov found the West egregiously guilty. Khomiakov could not justify such behavior that was in direct contradiction to his firm belief that the Church ultimately had God as its leader, it was not right for Man to try and usurp that power. This is why Khomiakov's emphasis on the invisible, metaphysical Church was so important. Yet this concept was based on an invisible construct of Christianity headed not by a single Pope or Patriarch, but by God. Bridging the gap between the eternal, infallible Church that had always existed and the one which humanity built and must, out of necessity of human life, abide with was a task Khomiakov himself never seemed able to articulate.

Khomiakov furthered his condemnation of the West by alluding to the fractious condition of Western Christianity. The multiplicity of Christian sects was a symptom of

the visible church's impermanence and incompleteness, and ensured that the West had lost the opportunity to achieve a fullness of faith. He contended that Truth could not be "distilled" through different parts or divisions of the Christian Church; Truth either exists or does not. The purity of faith was not protected by the physical evidence of church institutions of a plethora of theologians, but was safeguarded by the Holy Spirit for all time.²³ A Church of men could never independently preserve the Church, which is why Khomiakov constantly painted the Church in a greater light that embraced both the Church of men and the Church of heaven. Yet it was the heavenly Church that was always superior and unerring. For Khomiakov, the Church of men was merely a murky reflection of the unending perfection of God's Church.

Palmer's response to Khomiakov's ideas on distillations of the truth was quite telling. In general Palmer agreed that you cannot distill truth from error in regards to a "particular Church." For the Catholic Church, one example was the grievous error of Indulgences. But then he also pointed out the long held, uncanonical practice of re-Baptism in the Russian Church,²⁴ whereby new converts to the Russian Church were baptized a second time. In this way Palmer strategically placed the Orthodox East as well into the realm of an erring Church that alone was not the receptacle of Truth because it too had imperfections and inconsistencies. This argument placed Palmer and Khomiakov on different wavelengths. Palmer was still theorizing and arguing within the parameters of a particular physical church. Perhaps Palmer didn't fully realize that Khomiakov was conceptualizing the Church in an entirely new way. Or, more likely as we will see, Palmer was unable to fully subscribe to such a loose definition of the Church. A True

²³ Ibid., 39.

²⁴ Palmer to Khomiakov, 1 July, 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 53.

Church in Palmer's eyes must have a witness in the world, and Khomiakov's vision of the Church was far too abstract for the innate practicality of Palmer.

Palmer himself best summed up his 'institutionalist' needs for a Church so contrary to Khomiakov's ideal Church. We can see here the Palmer who craved the substance of Rome, speaking in the guise of his Catholic friends who were at the time persistently trying to persuade him to convert to Catholicism.

My Roman Catholic friends put the matter to me thus: 'If you believe in a *visible* Church, the first and only necessary question is, what is that Church now on earth which is identical in essence (e.g. in the spirit and idea that of universality, in zeal and charity for particular souls, and in its attitude of independence and, if need be, opposition to the powers of this world in spiritual things) with the Church of the first ages? You will scarcely dare to say that the Eastern or Greek Catholic Church is *the* Church, or else there is now no visible Church on earth which is the true perpetuation of that founded by the Apostles, you ought to have the sense to see that it is for the Church to teach you, and not for you to teach yourself of the Church.'²⁵

This clearly shows Palmer's innate need for an earthly church to have a visible force in the world. Palmer could not conceive of joining a Church which did not have the firm definitions that the Catholic Church had. The key here was Palmer's belief in a single, united, visible Church, characteristics that he didn't believe Orthodoxy possessed. In his wavering Palmer displayed an inability to decide his religious identity by himself. This strikes one as being very much against the spirit of Individualism, the recognition of a single man's inability to find Truth on his own. That was indeed very much akin to Khomiakov's mantra of anti-Individualism, which would seem to make the two all the

²⁵ Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 July 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 120-121.

more compatible. Only when Palmer looked beyond himself in search of Truth, he saw the Catholic Church as the best way to reside within a Church that had preserved its outward unity.

Khomiakov understood that the Catholic Church exuded a considerable aura of presence in the world. Vatican City and St. Peter's Basilica were testaments to the whole world, Christian and non-Christian alike, of the absolute, consolidated power of the Roman Church. But Khomiakov carefully dissected this outward, physical testament of power by ascribing this "zeal" that Palmer so earnestly longed for to something else entirely.

...permit me to add that the comparison which you institute between the zeal of the Romanists and the seeming indifference of the Eastern World is not quite fair. I do not deny the fact itself, nor do I express any doubt concerning the apparent superiority of the Latins in that respect; but I cannot admit their spirit of proselytism to be anything like a Christian feeling. I think it should be left quite out of the question, *as being the necessary result of a particular national or ecclesiastical organization*, nearly akin to the proselytizing spirit of Mohammedanism in the days of its pride. I will not condemn the zeal of the Romanists; it is in some respects too praiseworthy to be ill or even lightly spoken of; I can neither praise nor envy it. It is in many respects too un-Christian to be admired, as having produced and being always ready to produce more persecutors than martyrs.²⁶ Here, Khomiakov in no uncertain terms redefined this Catholic zeal as a militant programme equal in spirit to the Muslim invasions of the Christian world. This forced, almost militant spirituality meant an inherent lack of freedom, which was totally unacceptable for Khomiakov in any church, as the necessity of freedom formed one of

²⁶ Khomiakov to Palmer, 28 November 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 59. emphasis my own.

Khomiakov's core principles. The only way this forceful spirit of evangelization could exist is in the context of a "particular" visible, flawed Catholic Church. In other words, this harsh zeal was merely a byproduct of the political, bureaucratic organization that ran the Catholic Church, totally divorced from its spiritual identity.

Yet again, Khomiakov argued that although the outward integrity of the Catholic Church was preserved with a higher degree of unity than in the East, it also meant that the union was a forced one, and hence, not free. Freedom of a Church was absolutely essential for Khomiakov, and he saw in the principle of God's love a freedom which could not be denied. For, "Love is the crown and glory of the Church."²⁷ And because of this, the Church "...lives not under the law of slavery, but under the law of freedom. She [the Church] does not recognize anyone's judgment apart from the judgment of faith (for reason cannot comprehend her), and she expresses her love, her faith, and her hope in prayers and rituals inspired in her by the spirit of truth and Christ's grace."²⁸ However, if it was clear to Khomiakov that the Catholic Church was a slave to Popery, he also knew particularly well that the Orthodox Church in Russia was certainly not free either. Presided over by the Chief Procurator, a layman appointed by the Emperor, Russia's highest theological body, the Holy Synod, was clearly under the autocratic thumb of the Emperor.

Khomiakov was forced to modify his argument when he spoke of the actual physical Church. It was in this defense of Orthodoxy from Catholicism that Khomiakov employed one of his core doctrines; that of internal freedom and external existence. His formulation was succinctly stated in his eighth letter to William Palmer. "There must be a

²⁷ Khomiakov, "The Church is One," in *On Spiritual Unity*, 34.

²⁸ Ibid., 44.

visible Church, and that Church must be a *free* one.”²⁹ The Roman Church for Khomiakov was not free, “...though, I must add, free in its *principles*, though not always free in its *actions* or *manifestations*, which depend much upon accidental circumstances.”³⁰ This careful iteration of Khomiakov’s own doctrine was clearly to avoid the hypocrisy of calling the Russian Church free, but the Roman one not. It was again liberty which Khomiakov was chiefly concerned with later on in the same letter. “That the Roman Church is independent I will concede; but that it is anything like ecclesiastical freedom, the liberty of the Spirit, I totally deny.”³¹ As always, it was the ideal which mattered most to Khomiakov, and Orthodoxy’s ideal form was preserved in its principles, which were unwavering.

The Polish historian Andrej Walicki has some interesting insights into this complex relationship for Khomiakov. Walicki agrees that for Khomiakov there was a fundamental difference between the Church in reality and the Church in principle, and that the principle of the Church is infinitely more important.³² Or, in other words, the Church in word versus the Church in deed should be separated. For Khomiakov, much of the blame that Orthodoxy was presumably responsible for, most notably that lack of zeal in its mission, was not the error of the Church.

What, then, was responsible, if not the Church itself? Khomiakov was always careful to assign the shortcoming of Orthodoxy to humanity and not the Church itself. Orthodoxy could never be at fault, at fault were the temporal nations which had inherited

²⁹ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 123.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pg 124.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

³² Andrej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 190.

her as their faith.³³ Again, this argument created the segregation of the organization of the Church and the metaphysical Church. This was precisely what Khomiakov used in preserving the Orthodox Church from error in respect to its earthly mission. As Khomiakov states, “But does not this faintness of zeal...imply a defect in the Eastern Church herself(?)...this I cannot admit. It may be considered as a defect of the nations to whom the destiny of the Church is temporarily confided (be they Russians or Greeks), but can nowise be considered as a stain to the Church itself.”³⁴

This leads us to another major theme of the correspondence; that is the role of Church and State in Orthodoxy. If, as it was in fact, Orthodoxy had been “temporarily” assigned to Russia, then the Orthodox Church there as a matter of course had to exist within the political entity of the Russian Empire. This was naturally problematic for a religion which Khomiakov was so careful to place outside the purview of any political, secular human influence. Yet the Russian Church was part of a political entity. Khomiakov was forced to agree with Palmer and lament the State’s domination of the Russian Church, but he saw it merely as an unfortunate, temporary situation that in no way constituted error in the Church. Russian Orthodoxy’s political dominance by the State was unforgivable for Palmer, and simply an inconvenience for Khomiakov.

Khomiakov did see a solution to this complicated Church-State situation in Russia. As Walicki is keen to point out, the ideal relationship between the Church and State as far as Khomiakov was concerned was one of non-interference. There should be a mutual agreement between Emperor and Holy Synod that the State should not interfere in matters of Church doctrine or theology, and the Church should abstain from activity in

³³ Khomiakov to Palmer, 28 Nov. 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 57.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

the political affairs of the State.³⁵ What was missing in Khomiakov's view of course was how this could be accomplished. As in Khomiakov's conceptualization of the Orthodox Church, the ideal was exalted at the expense of any practical approach to solving the problem; the road from the troubled situation at hand to a totally independent Church was not illuminated, it is only the destination we can see.

Christoff gives a more concrete example of Khomiakov's non-interference position in an examination of Khomiakov's views on education in Russia. Khomiakov firmly believed in Russia's special mission to the world as the carrier of the True Orthodox Faith, and educating Russians about this fundamental principle was just as important. But what would the Russian State have to say in Khomiakov's envisioned system? One would assume that the government would be just as responsible for instilling in its youth the importance of its country in the world. When it came to religion, though, Khomiakov firmly stated that the State should remain on the sidelines. The Russian government, due to the fact that it was so heavily influenced by Western philosophies, had polluted Russian theological education. Khomiakov candidly admitted as much to Palmer. "I must confess that my explanations were in evident opposition to many definitions of the Church and its essence given by some of our divines educated, I fear, under the influence of Western tendencies and science, which are rather predominant in Russian schools."³⁶ Furthermore, Orthodoxy should be painted in a non-critical, laudatory way.³⁷ Once again, a leery Khomiakov did not want State interference in matters of the Church; the two must be separated.

³⁵ Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy*, 195-196.

³⁶ Khomiakov to Palmer, 8 Oct. 1850, in *Russia and the English Church*, 94.

³⁷ Christoff, *Xomjakov*, 181-183.

Palmer was not interested in what Khomiakov desired of the State in principle. What mattered most to Palmer was the relationship between the Russian State and Church that actually existed. Although Khomiakov firmly asserted that the Church need only remain “free in principle”, that was clearly not enough for Palmer. With the ideal separation of Church and State remaining just that, an ideal, Palmer found yet another crucial obstacle blocking his acceptance of the Orthodox Church.

In particular, Palmer refused to accept the censorship that had for so long plagued Russia and was constantly interfering in both religious and secular matters. The censorship during Nicholas I’s reign had become particularly oppressive. In Palmer’s September 22nd, 1851 letter to Khomiakov, he clearly referenced the dubious nature of Russia’s Censorship office. Palmer had enclosed some of his religious writings, including a petition to the Patriarch of Constantinople regarding the possibilities of Christian reconciliation between East and West. Palmer strongly doubted that this document would reach Khomiakov, due to the fact that it also contained commentary on the history of the Romanov Dynasty. Palmer’s intentional mention that such a thing, however, insignificant, could not reach Khomiakov was clearly a sign of the lack of free society in which the Church for Palmer must exist. Palmer lamented that such a politically unimportant document was “...too delicate a matter for any other Censor than the Emperor himself to be at all likely to estimate justly what may be written upon it.”³⁸ Palmer, as a potential convert, could not see how an outsider to the Russian Orthodox world like himself could be expected to justify to his friends in the West a Church and society which was not free in practice, regardless of principles.

³⁸ Palmer to Khomiakov, 22 Sept. 1851, in *Russia and the English Church*, 109.

Palmer more clearly iterated this problem of joining an oppressed Church in his July 5th 1852 letter to Khomiakov, while simultaneously adding to the consequences for such a Church.

As regards Russia, the difficulty which with me seems insurmountable, is this:- that the present relations of the Spiritual and Civil Powers within the Russian Empire are such as to be inconsistent with the due exercise of the Apostolical Office. In Russia itself the administration of the Government and the Censorship keep all things quiet as they are, so that individuals neither perceive the true nature of many questions, nor the inevitable developments and consequences of principles which have once been admitted; and so they might be inclined to think that one were less scrupulous and would consent to be blind as they are blind, or silent as they are silent, and to acquiesce in and become a party to that which they find no difficulty in acquiescing in and being parties to.³⁹

So not only would any Church that was subject to the government be unacceptable to Palmer, but it would also be in violation of its Apostolic duties. By this, Palmer clearly pointed out that it was the Church hierarchy (all bishops, archbishops, metropolitans, and so forth) that must exercise sole power and not a lay appointed official or even an emperor, for that matter, to control the Church. This was very important for a religious man like Palmer. The Apostolic succession of bishops was a system set up by Christ Himself in the New Testament beginning at Pentecost, and had to continue. Palmer insisted upon the Church as a theocracy of Christ and not that of an autocrat.

In a later letter to Khomiakov, Palmer again brought up the issue of the Russian government's intervention in matters that should be wholly for the Church to deal with. Again, the issue for Palmer was the lack of freedom of the bishops, the Apostolic

³⁹ Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 July 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 117-118.

successors, in the context of the Russian State. “What I find fault with is, not the undue timidity of subserviency of a Metropolitan or Patriarch of Synod, but the permanent existence of irregular institutions calculated and introduced by the Civil Power expressly to transfer to itself upon the whole, and by virtue of the system, a large portion of that power which belongs essentially to the Apostles.”⁴⁰ He then went on to charge the Russian Church hierarchs with only operating within the boundaries dictated by the “Caesar” of the land, in this case of course, the tsar.⁴¹ Freedom in principle was simply not enough for Palmer, the freedom must be absolute.

This lack of liberty would also make it impossible for Palmer to rationalize his conversion either to himself or to anyone else. Palmer was a man approaching the Orthodox Church through doctrine and careful contemplation, not by revelation. Such abuses of power that prevented freedom could not be excused. “I cannot deny or dissemble the undue supremacy now held by the State in Russia; and if I were to make light of it, as if such usurpation had no essential bearing upon the Catholic faith and discipline of Christ...I should merely be exhibiting myself in the eyes of all in the West as a fool or a madman, without in any way strengthening the position of the Eastern Church by my adhesions to her...”⁴² Palmer clearly could not in good conscience ascribe to such a subversion to the power of the Church. It critically hampered the duties of a Church, but perhaps more importantly as Palmer pointed out earlier, its members were no longer free to decide things for themselves. What could be more important than that for a potential convert to Orthodoxy like Palmer or anyone else for that matter? “I could not satisfactorily defend myself, either to my own conscience or to my countrymen, if I

⁴⁰ Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 April 1853, in *Russia and the English Church*, 150.

⁴¹ Ibid., 150.

⁴² Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 July 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 118.

sought admission to the communion of a particular Church in which I am not free to discuss freely and publicly (through in a spirit of sincere loyalty to all worldly authorities) matters which are of essential importance to religion.”⁴³

Khomiakov understood and to some degree sympathized with Palmer’s objections to the Russian State’s dominance of the Church. “That the Church is not quite independent of the State, I allow...”⁴⁴ In an earlier letter, Khomiakov also pointed out that while the overall status of the Russian Church was healthy, it would have been even stronger “...if we had not too much of political religion...”⁴⁵ Things would simply have been better “...if the State was more convinced that Christian truth has no need of constant protection, and is rather weakened than strengthened by an excessive solicitude.”⁴⁶ Perhaps Khomiakov’s greatest concession to Palmer’s objections was his admission of the lack of liberty to speak freely about many matters religious, as well as his belief that the occurrence of religious heresies would drastically decrease if the faithful were better informed about their own religion.⁴⁷ These issues were more of annoyances for Khomiakov, not cardinal errors. This was of course far from all Khomiakov had to say on the matter, but clearly he was willing to accept the existence of certain problems of interference.

When carefully and intelligently attacked on the issue of State dominance of the Church by Palmer, Khomiakov in typical fashion rose to the occasion, empowered by the challenge, and reverted back to his fundamental emphasis on freedom in principle.

⁴³ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁴ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 126.

⁴⁵ Khomiakov to Palmer, 8 Oct. 1850, in *Russia and the English Church*, 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 95.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 96.

A society may be dependent in fact and free in principle, or vice versa. The first case is mere historical accident; the second it the destruction of freedom, and has no other issue but rebellion and anarchy. The first is the weakness of man; the second of the depravity of law. The first is certainly the case in Russia, but the principles are by no means deteriorated.⁴⁸ The only thing that Khomiakov would admit to was the bothersome censorship and intense screening of literature that the State conducted. It was not, however, a deeper problem. “But this error, which my reason condemns, has nothing to do with ecclesiastical liberty.”⁴⁹ For Khomiakov, his principle of the Church’s internal freedom was preserved in ecclesiastical liberty, even if the Church solicited the State for protection.

Regrettable as the State’s interference was, Khomiakov found fault, as before, not with the Church itself, but with the imperfect humans who controlled it. Once again, the division between the visible and invisible Church was absolutely crucial to Khomiakov’s argument. As with Orthodoxy’s lack of missionary zeal, it was the nations and individuals who temporarily harbored and controlled Orthodoxy that were at fault. “But then all this is nothing but the temporary error of rather timid politicians, and will pass...”⁵⁰ And again in a later letter to Palmer, speaking about the weakness of the Russian Church that constantly sought the State’s protection, Khomiakov stated, “There is certainly a moral error in that want of reliance upon God Himself; but it is an accidental error of *persons*, and not of *the Church*, and has nothing to do with our religious convictions.”⁵¹ Khomiakov wanted to make as sure to show Palmer that the principle of freedom was not violated, even if the politicization of the Church by the State

⁴⁸ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 126.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 127.

⁵⁰ Khomiakov to Palmer, 8 Oct. 1850, in *Russia and the English Church*, 96.

⁵¹ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 127.

had restricted its independence. The bottom line for Khomiakov was that the Russian Church's legitimacy was never compromised, it was merely inconvenienced.

E. G. Cook agrees that Palmer had craved and needed an external freedom of bishops and the hierarchy in the Church, and that it interfered with the Apostolic Succession of bishops. He also points out that Khomiakov was never close to many official ecclesiastical authorities within the Russian Church.⁵² Khomiakov seemed to be very independently minded in his views about the Church, which in effect made him anti-authoritarian. Since, as we have seen, Khomiakov placed very little confidence in man's ability to regulate and preserve the Church, he strove to rest the earthly Church on the shoulders of the laity more than the ruling hierarchs. This was very sympathetic to his Slavophile beliefs on the inherent greatness of the people, the Russian *narod*. The authority that Khomiakov knew the Church needed would be found more in the freedom of mutual love of the Church's people, a cause that Khomiakov so passionately championed, and less so with the imperfect ecclesiastics who temporarily operated the Church. Hierarchs came and went, but Khomiakov saw an inexhaustible supply of authority in the congregation of the faithful. Neither Protestantism nor Catholicism could accomplish such a feat, only the Orthodox Church, who guarded the uninterrupted Christian Tradition. In his words:

Romanism is an unnatural tyranny; Protestantism is an unprincipled revolt. Neither of them can be accepted. But where is unity without tyranny? Where is freedom without revolt to be found? They are both to be found in the ancient, continuous, unadulterated Tradition of the Church. There a unity is to be found more authoritative than the despotism of the Vatican, *for it is based on the strength of mutual love*. There a liberty is to be found

⁵² Cook, *Khomjakov* 78-79.

more free than the license of Protestantism, for it is *regulated by the humility of mutual love*. There is the Rock and the Refuge.⁵³

William Palmer and Aleksei Khomiakov had covered a vast array of topics within their lengthy ten-year correspondence. Although there were certainly many factors which gave Palmer pause about joining the Orthodox Church, there was one other issue which seemed to have a little bit more gravity for Palmer than others. This was the issue of his Re-baptism were he to join the Orthodox Church.

Palmer was a man of convictions, but also a man of intellect. He was a professor of theology at Magdalene College in Oxford, certainly no small feat. His theological journey was just as much a quest of the intellect as it was the heart. Theologically, Palmer had to be convinced that Orthodoxy was the right course for him. So, although issues of power and authority in the Church mattered a great deal to him, any theological inconsistencies would prove to be greatly significant for Palmer. When he looked into the possibility of joining the Orthodox Communion, he found himself in another quandary. The problem was a simple one; Palmer was receiving contradictory statements from the Greek and the Russian Churches. The Greek Church in Constantinople required Palmer's complete Re-baptism in order for him to be recognized as an Orthodox Christian. The Russian Church was willing to recognize his Anglican Baptism, and was only asking for his Chrismation to affirm his entry into the Russian Church. Palmer, as early as his second letter to Khomiakov in July of 1846, mentioned that even the Russians had for a long time required the "...uncanonical rebaptizing of Christians already baptized..."⁵⁴ Even though the Russian Church had in Palmer's view corrected its error, the fact that the

⁵³ Khomiakov to Palmer, 6 June 1851, in *Russia and the English Church*, 102.

⁵⁴ Palmer to Khomiakov, 1 July 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 53.

Greeks and Russians were at odds over this issue was still problematic for Palmer because it betrayed a larger disunity between the two largest Orthodox Churches, the Greek and Russian. Palmer's angst about the issue is neatly contained in his September 22nd, 1851 letter to Khomiakov.

Thus I am myself unable to be received to Communion, if I desire it, without either professing myself to be as yet unbaptized, contrary to my own belief and the declarations of the Russian Church, or being received by a part only instead of the whole of the Eastern Church, the Russian, while another part, the Greek, tell me that I am as yet unbaptized, and have been improperly received as baptized by the Russians.⁵⁵

No doubt it would be beneficial to look into why Palmer was so distraught over his possible Re-baptism. I believe the answer to be quite simple yet profoundly important. Many times in the correspondence, Khomiakov and Palmer find themselves at odds with the addition of the *Filioque* in the Constantinopolitan Creed, a discrepancy between Orthodoxy and Catholicism which seemed to produce a heretical double-procession of the Holy Spirit in the eyes of Orthodox theologians. This Creed was recognized by both men as an essential cornerstone to the Christian Faith. Both undoubtedly knew that one of the main components of the Creed reads: "I acknowledge *one* Baptism for the remission of sins."⁵⁶ Palmer was attempting to join the Orthodox Church in its entirety, and even if the Russian Church no longer required Re-baptism, the fact that the Greek Church required it was unacceptable and immoral. In Palmer's last known letter to Khomiakov, he for the last time repeated the seriousness of one Baptism.

⁵⁵ Palmer to Khomiakov, 22 Sept. 1851, in *Russia and the English Church*, 109.

⁵⁶ "Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom," in *Service Books of the Orthodox Church*, vol. 1 (South Canaan, Pennsylvania: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1984), 70. emphasis my own.

“He who comes to be baptized is either most sacrilegiously trifling, or he must be able sincerely to seek from God the grace of Baptism, which he cannot seek if he believe that he has received it already.”⁵⁷

Khomiakov no doubt knew why Palmer’s reservations about Re-baptism were so important. But Khomiakov took this discrepancy as well to be a local error that was not applicable to the whole Church. It was again Khomiakov’s separation of the local Orthodox Churches and their creeds and practices with the higher realm of the Church which always preserved its sanctity. “The blame falls on the individuals (whether they be Bishops or laymen signifies nothing). But the Church herself stands blameless and pure, reforming the local error, but never in need of reform.”⁵⁸ Fallen Man once again took the responsibility for the earthly church’s shortcomings.

Khomiakov saw Palmer’s dilemma quite differently. He did not see massive theological implications or problems with Re-baptism, he saw it merely as a matter of church rite. Khomiakov then reflected on the Sacrament of Marriage in the Church, and noticed that when non-Christian married couples convert to Christianity, it was not required for them to be re-married, the rite of conversion renders “sacramental quality to the preceding union.”⁵⁹ He went on to assert that it would not be an error to re-marry such a convert couple. Perhaps recognizing his inability to totally dispel the discrepancy, Khomiakov ended by saying, “The re-baptizing of Christians did not contain any error, but the admission of error (if error be) having been a local one is quite sufficient for the justification of the Eastern Church.”⁶⁰ Khomiakov made a distinction here, and by

⁵⁷ Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 April 1853, in *Russia and the English Church*, 147.

⁵⁸ Khomiakov to Palmer, 28 Nov. 1846, in *Russia and the English Church*, 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 63.

ascribing theoretical error to a *local* church, shows that it was not a practice the Orthodox Church in its entirety adopted. The community of the Church had never embraced this, and thus, it was not doctrinal error. As Khomiakov more eloquently stated it in a later letter, “The error will soon be dispelled, and proves nothing against us; local Churches are often inclined to temporary errors, from which they are rescued by their belonging to a Catholic Union.”⁶¹

Yet the issue never decreased in significance for Palmer. It was the disjointed voice of the Orthodox Churches, the lack of unity in opinion that Palmer objected to. Palmer needed his church to have the consistency of doctrine and physical unity, a unity that Khomiakov saw as an intrinsic quality of the Orthodox Church, not requiring physical evidence. Palmer in no uncertain terms rejected Khomiakov’s principles of the unimportance of the individual and an inconsequential temporary error of a local Church. “The discrepancy may, or may not, be of secondary importance, as a question of virtue or fact, in itself; but to *me*, to the *individual*, it is absolutely necessary (physically necessary) that I should be able to assume this or that position.”⁶²

At last I believe we can clearly see why the inconsistencies and discrepancies in the Eastern Church on the issue of Baptism were so damning to a theologian like Palmer seeking to join a united Church. Though Khomiakov saw only differences in rite and ceremony with no effectual change in Doctrine, Palmer saw something infinitely more, and wonderfully rendered it in his last letter to his friend, Khomiakov.

But for me, as in individual, Baptism, past or future is, or must be, the beginning of my Christianity; and the first practical question for me in seeking any communion is this: Have I already been baptized, or must I

⁶¹ Khomiakov to Palmer, 4 Sept. 1852, in *Russia and the English Church*, 125.

⁶² Palmer to Khomiakov, 5 April 1853, in *Russia and the English Church*, 147.

know seek to be baptized? If the communion to which I address myself either tells me what I cannot believe on the subject, or tells me two contrary propositions at once, which is equivalent to telling me nothing and making no answer, I must consider this fact to be an obstacle to my continuing to seek their communion. I must say to them, that they must be able to tell me distinctly whether I am baptized or unbaptized, before they can deal with me, or I with them, on any ulterior matter.⁶³

And so the issue remained forever unresolved between the two men, and in part due to external circumstances, the beginning of the Crimean War in 1855, and in part due to each man's immovable convictions on the matter. But clearly a more central problem of Palmer's abandonment of joining the Orthodox Communion could not be found. He remained deeply sympathetic to Orthodoxy, particularly in Russia, publishing a long discourse on the issues of Orthodoxy for foreigners, entitled *Dissertations on Subjects in the Orthodox Church*. And it is entirely evident throughout the course of the long dialogue between these two men that Palmer provided Khomiakov with a rare opportunity to discuss deep, passionately important religious questions for this leading Slavophile.

Palmer's conversion to Catholicism in 1855 was in effect the final word he had to say on the matter, marking the end of the ten-year correspondence for both men. Included in Birkbeck's collection of the correspondence is Palmer's "Confession of Faith" made upon his entry into the Catholic Church. In it, he clearly stated that he came very near to joining the Orthodox Church, but was unable. In a most honest examination of his own desire, Palmer made no excuses for his predilection towards Catholicism. What was more interesting was what Palmer had to say regarding his inner struggle in converting to

⁶³ Ibid., 146.

Orthodoxy. “And he (Palmer) cannot deny that even when he thought himself obliged to seek admission to the Communion of the Greek of Eastern Church he dreaded rather than wished for success...”⁶⁴ Even though Palmer sought to join the Orthodox Church, his feelings of dread can perhaps be attributed to that cultural gulf that Khomiakov felt created an unbridgeable gap between East and West.

The correspondence was the continual struggle over whether the Orthodox Church possessed that unity and purity of faith that Palmer so ardently hoped for. Khomiakov saw inner freedom and infallibility in Orthodoxy, totally devoid of error. The lack of missionary zeal, the pride and disdain of the West against Orthodoxy, and Orthodoxy’s close ties to the Russian State were not a reflection of the Church herself, but of the human influences that guided her. The Church’s inward freedom had rescued it from the unholy autocracy of the Pope instead of Christ, as well as the rational principles of the Protestant West which also negated the freedom of the Church. For Khomiakov, Palmer’s arguments and issues with Orthodoxy never amounted to internal error of the Church, but only the temporary error of the individual.

Khomiakov looked constantly to a Church that couldn’t be seen, and Palmer sought earnestly a Church he could not find. Khomiakov found that gap between the seen and unseen to be populated by weak men who had stained the Church here on earth, but never violated the purity of her doctrine. Palmer had to find a Church whose physical witness was a reflection of that unseen order and perfection; a perfection that Khomiakov was content to find only in his unshakable faith in the Church. Regardless of one’s own

⁶⁴ William Palmer, “Mr. Palmer’s Profession of Faith Upon Joining the Roman Communion,” in *Russia and the English Church* ed. W. J. Birkbeck, 180.

religious convictions or perspectives, it is unfortunate that these two men could not find more common ground and more hope for a reconciliation between their two societies.

Conclusion: Khomiakov's Legacy

In assessing the legacy of an individual, it is often useful to look at how others have treated and in some respects created that legacy. Aleksei Khomiakov's influence on Orthodox theology in particular cannot be underestimated. His protégé and friend, Yuri Samarin, espoused the idea that Khomiakov had become a kind of liberator for Orthodox theology. In his famous appraisal of Khomiakov's impact in the introduction to the first anthology of Khomiakov's theology which appeared in 1867, Samarin immortalized an image of Khomiakov as the man who broke the bonds of Western influence in Orthodox thought.

Western theology, argued Samarin, had removed itself from the Orthodox Church by creating an entirely new theological system that was inherently false because it did not emanate from within the Church. Instead of responding in a unique voice, the Orthodox Church merely defended itself from these attacks. Anti-Protestant and anti-Latin camps emerged, bickering ensued, and Orthodox theology lost its footing. It was drawn into a debate that had to be argued according to the Western theological precepts. It was like fighting a battle that could not be won.¹ Then came Khomiakov, who "...was the first to look at Romanism and Protestantism *from inside the Church*, and therefore *from above*."²

And what was the effect of this radical change in Orthodox theology that Khomiakov began?

But now, thanks to Khomiakov, everything is shifting. Formerly, we had seen two sharply defined forms of Western Christianity, and, *between*

¹ Yuri Samarin, "On the Theological Writings of Aleksei Khomiakov," in *On Spiritual Unity: A Slavophile Reader* eds. and trans. Robert Bird and Boris Jakim (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1998), 172-73.

² *Ibid.*, 173.

them, Orthodoxy, which had stopped at the crossroads, as it were. But now we see the *Church*, the living organism of the truth, entrusted to mutual love, while outside the Church we see logical knowledge detached from the moral principle, that is, *rationalism* in two stages of development: (1) Romanism, or rationalistic understanding that grasps at the *phantom* of truth and surrenders freedom to enslavement by external *authority* and (2) Protestantism, or rationalistic understanding that seeks its *own, homemade* truth and sacrifices unity to *subjective* sincerity.³

This was a perfect encapsulation of Khomiakov's unshakable view. Khomiakov set Orthodoxy apart, he gave it a sense of otherness and attacked the Western Churches from without. Espousing his crucial beliefs in a free, living Church, he attacked Western society for their philosophy that was separate from a Christian knowledge coming from within the Church and her sobornost. It was precisely the Western philosophies of rationalism and individualism that had produced the errors inherent in the Protestant and Catholic Churches.

In his conclusion Samarin proclaimed Khomiakov a "teacher of the Church,"⁴ a high honor accorded to the Greek theologians of the early Christian Church. Regardless of anyone's personal views of Khomiakov's critique of Western society, he certainly can be seen as helping give Orthodox thought back a sense of its own identity. Instead of engaging in theological debate from outside itself, Khomiakov helped create a platform from which Orthodoxy could examine and analyze Western Christendom from within itself.

While most modern-day theologians and philosophers would agree about Khomiakov's positive impact on theology, there are a few who do not. Pavel Florensky

³ Ibid., 176.

⁴ Ibid., 183.

was far and away one of the 20th century's most influential Orthodox theologians, and also an outspoken critic of Khomiakov. Florensky accused Khomiakov of immanentism, which Florensky saw as the Protestant drive to put humanity at the center of God's creation, and to understand God within the confines of humanity as we have defined Him. The Orthodox approach, so argued Florensky, was ontologism, by which humanity accepted God's reality and did not attempt to invent its own.⁵ Although Khomiakov was himself aware of these effects of Protestantism, Florensky felt he became susceptible to the same error in his concept of sobornost. By creating sobornost, Khomiakov had created a way for an individual within the Church to discover spiritual Truth simply because the Church proclaimed it to be Truth. And that ability implied the need of Man's perceptions, his definitions of Truth instead of a transcendent acceptance of that Truth.⁶ Although he was guilty of creating this "impression," Florensky admitted that Khomiakov was not himself aware of creating this problem.⁷

Yet perhaps Florensky was merely responding to an over-zealous idolization of Khomiakov that was taking place in the early twentieth century that bordered on hagiography. Florensky noted a number of times the immense impact and lionization of Khomiakov in Orthodox theology, but wondered whether its interpretations of Khomiakov's work were leading to healthy conclusions for Orthodoxy.

The last opinion that I will consider is that of Nikolai Berdiaev, a prominent Russian philosopher and thinker in the early 20th century. With his 1912 biography *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov*, Berdiaev lauded Khomiakov in much the same way Samarin did "Khomiakov, above all else, was an excellent theologian, the first free

⁵ Pavel Florensky, "Around Khomiakov," in *On Spiritual Unity*, 323-24.

⁶ Ibid., 324.

⁷ Ibid., 324.

Russian theologian,”⁸ asserted Berdiaev. And later on, “He was the first great religious thinker in Orthodoxy, he opened the path for free religious philosophy, a path blocked by scholastic theology. He was the first the break down that scholastic theology.”⁹ Berdiaev definitely seemed to agree with Samarin’s assessment of Khomiakov as a liberator of Orthodox theology.

But where does that leave us, the modern reader, who has seen even the century of Berdiaev and Florensky come to a close? Russia did not, as Khomiakov predicted, renew herself in a return to Orthodoxy. But Russia did in many ways transform the world. The rise of Soviet Russia and the Cold War undeniably changed the world of the twentieth century, a time some would call the Russian Century. Early Soviet Russia was permeated with a strong sense of messianism, a firm belief that they were building a brave new world that would also transform the West. Although Soviet ideology was so diametrically opposed to the Khomiakov’s thought, the dream that an enlightened Russia would liberate the world lived on. And an Orthodox Church did rise in the West, as Khomiakov had foreseen. While Khomiakov’s theories presented some problems to Orthodox theologians, they do not deny the great impact he had on modern theology.

The English theologian Timothy Ware, who published the classic *The Orthodox Church* in 1963, gave many modern readers in the West a first look at Orthodoxy from the perspective a Western scholar. It was something new, not a translated work from Russian or Greek theologians, but a contemporary look at the history of Orthodoxy written in English by an Englishman. Ware, who like Palmer studied and teaches at Oxford, converted to Orthodoxy from the Anglican Church in the 1950s and went on to

⁸ Nikolai Berdiaev, *Aleksei Stepanovich Khomiakov* (Westmead, England: Gregg International Publishing, 1971), 79.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

become an Orthodox Bishop in England. Ware has mentioned the influence of Khomiakov's writings in his decision to join the Orthodox Church. In a reflection on his religious explorations that led him to Orthodoxy, Ware noted, "On the more theological level, a crucial landmark in my journey was Alexis Khomiakov's short essay, 'The Church is One.'"¹⁰ Yet later on Ware also pointed out that, "In later years, as I read more widely in Orthodox theology, I came to recognize the limitations of Khomiakov's Slavophil ecclesiology, but at the time he provided me with exactly what I needed."¹¹ Perhaps in Ware's conversion, we can see him taking the last steps in a spiritual journey that Palmer began, but was unable to complete; a journey that left Palmer frustrated and instead ended in his conversion to Catholicism. This is not said at all in the hopes of Orthodoxy converting the West, but maybe it is a sign of the emerging compatibility of East and West. The intrinsic community of the Church in sobornost and the unity of the Church that Khomiakov saw and fervently believed in is perhaps coming to embrace a larger vision of overall Christian unity. An Orthodox Church in the West could be the beginning of a far greater coming together, a bridging of that cultural, philosophical and religious gap that has, since long before the time of the Slavophiles, separated East and West

¹⁰ Timothy Ware, "Strange Yet Familiar: My Journey to the Orthodox Church," www.geocities.com/trvalentine/orthodox/ware_conversion.html (accessed on 2 May, 2006).

¹¹ Ibid.

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